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II

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BELL OF ST. PAUL'S

BY
WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF
'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN' 'DOROTHY FORSTER'
'FOR FAITH AND FREEDOM' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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THE BELL OF ST. PAUL'S

PART II—continued

CHAPTER VI

AN INTERRUPTED RAMBLE

THE exploration of Poet and Player Land was followed by other rambles, Althea always being guide. In this way the young man whom she conducted—never had colonial visitor so splendid a chance!—learned to surround all kinds of mean and squalid places with the halo of history and romance. They remain, it is true, mean and squalid still; but just as Bank Side itself was made glorious by the setting sun and by the goddess who came

down the river in the golden mist, so the narrow lanes in which they wandered are clothed, in his mind, with the memories of the past. Nay, when he still thinks of them, he sees again the graceful figure of the girl, again he watches her earnest face, he feels again the look of her steadfast eyes, he hears her voice sweet and low. Where the crowded streets now cover what was once the splendid Abbey of Bermoundsey : where Lambeth Palace stands beside the river : where were once Cupid's Gardens : where the ships stick their bowsprits across the streets of Rotherhithe : beside the pretty lake of Southwark Park : yea, and across the river in the heart of London City, the girl walked beside him, rapt and serious, recalling things that have been. It is a time which he will not readily forget. How should he forget the happiest time in his life—those days when, for the first time in his life, he began to feel that henceforth life would be impossible without one girl? A man may suffer from such an attack and recover

from it; and again he may suffer and again recover—nay, there are men who have it like a quartan fever; but the first experience is the most severe and the most delightful. Such worship can a young man bring to one woman only, in all his life. Of which more anon.

These rambles must remain unchronicled. Can we not make them out for ourselves from the London books?

But one day, a fortnight or so after their first walk, they proposed to travel, all through one afternoon, from west to east, from Puddle Dock to Tower Hill, from one end to the other of Thames Street. It was an ambitious programme, because the history of London might almost be written in Thames Street alone. Yet they attempted it, and, but for an unexpected interruption, they would have carried it through.

It was again, as on their first walk, a Saturday afternoon. On other afternoons the street is filled with noise: its cranes in the

upper stories are always labouring, creaking and groaning as they lift or lower the bales : the sky is darkened with these big bales as they swing and threaten over the heads of the passengers : there is a bawling from Billingsgate which can be heard afar off : waggons lumber along and block the road : clerks hasten up and down : porters lean against posts and converse loudly, not without frequent use of the decorative word which always brightens workaday English. But on Saturday there is a holy calm. If it is a bright afternoon the sunshine on the tall warehouses makes them look like mediæval fortresses or Italian Palazzi.

One would rather walk down Thames Street than the High of Oxford or the Cannebière of Marseilles, or the Rue St. Honoré. The modern warehouses are not in the least picturesque, yet the names which remain carry the memory back ; the succession of churches, though broken here and there by the havoc of modern barbarians, marks

the piety of London merchants; the narrow courts still lead to the old stairs, and the two ancient ports of Queenhithe and Billingsgate can still be seen.

The sunshine fell upon the street this afternoon as they stood at the West end of it in Printing House Square.

‘You are going to teach me more history,’ said Laurence. ‘Shall we become ghosts once more?’

‘If you like,’ she replied. ‘But there is a great deal more history here than I can teach you in a single afternoon. Come.’

Then she began to talk. London began in Thames Street, where two little hillocks, with a brook between, rose above the river, on either side a swamp. When the hillocks were quite built upon and still there was not room enough for the trade which continued to grow, they built a river wall and more houses behind it; and then they constructed their two ports, and as they grew richer they began to build stately houses upon the river wall; at

one end Baynard's Castle and at the other the Tower: in the midst Cold Harbour and the King's Steelyard. Here lived the Hanse merchants: here were the Halls of City Companies; in the streets leading up the hill at the back stood many a noble mansion in its courtyard, full of precious carvings, rich tapestry and caskets from foreign parts: along the street was a succession of noble churches, each with its monuments and tombs, its vaults and its churchyard filled with the bones of dead citizens.

‘Do you see the dead citizens walking in the streets?’ asked Laurence.

‘Sometimes,’ she replied, with a little blush. ‘On Sunday morning, when there has been no one in the street but myself, I have met Sir Richard Whittington, tall and thin, grey-bearded, with a chain of esses round his neck and a black velvet coat over his silk doublet. He is a very stately figure: he carries himself with dignity, and in his face there is Authority.’

Then Althea led her scholar down the narrow courts to the river-side, and up the streets which lead to the higher part: she showed him the churches and the places where the churches had been: Whittington's College and the place where his bones are lying still: the Companies' Halls: the port of Queenhithe, which still preserves its ancient form though the buildings round it are modern: the great houses still standing, and the ancient stairs and wharves—she was filled to overflowing with the history of the whole.

When they were as yet no more than half-way down the street occurred the interruption which has been already mentioned. Althea stopped at the corner of a street leading north. A little way up the street there was a church Tower set a little back, and, projecting from its face, a great clock reaching half-way across the street, with a curious little figure upon it. This church led to the Unexpected Event which changed the aspect and the memory of that walk.

‘It is the church of St. Leonard le Size,’ she said. ‘I wonder if you would like to see it. There is not a great deal to see, but the wood carvings are fine, and it is Aunt Cornelia’s Church. She is always there.’

‘Aunt Cornelia’s church! My brain reels. Is she the Rector, or the Vicar, or perhaps the Curate only?’

Althea laughed.

‘Why,’ she said, ‘Aunt Cornelia is the pew-opener and care-taker.’

‘Oh!’ His face fell. The drop from Rector or Vicar—at one time he had even thought of Bishop or Archdeacon—to Care-taker and Pew-opener was sudden and overwhelming. His cousin too! He would have greatly preferred hearing that she was the Incumbent of the Living.

‘Her husband was Sexton of the church, and so she got the place. Mr. Waller, I thought you knew that at Bank Side we are all humble people. What else could you expect?’

‘I have found, Miss Indagine, what no one would have expected.’

‘You mean that you have found my father.’ He did not exactly mean that, but the girl said it in the most perfect innocence and without any consciousness of what another girl would have seen at once. Therefore he accepted the interpretation with meekness.

‘Why not a pew-opener?’ he replied. ‘Pews must be opened. It is a part of the Church Ritual. Where there are pews there must be pew-openers. In the early Church—but I forget the Greek for pew-opener——’ Then a curious arithmetical problem arose in his brain and took the form of a sum in Rule of Three: ‘If a Pew-opener be described as in the Church, what may be the limits of the Higher Branch?’ But he reserved the solution of this problem for a fitting opportunity.

‘Come and see the church,’ said Althea, ‘and Aunt Cornelia in it.’

‘Why do you call her Aunt? You are no relation of the Cottles, are you?’

‘No, indeed. But I have known Cassie and Flavia all my life, and so, you see, I have got into the way. Here is the porch.’

She would have led the way into the church, but stopped and drew back.’

‘Oh!’ she murmured, with pity in her voice. ‘Here is that poor creature again.’

From the church within there were heard voices: first, a hard measured voice speaking with precision, and as the words were harsh, they seemed to fall like hammers. The other was a soft and gentle voice, replying humbly.

‘You mean to stand there and tell me that you have dusted and swept the whole church—the whole church—in this short time?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’ve forgotten the organ.’

‘I have not forgotten anything.’

‘Then there was never any money so easily earned. I wonder you are not ashamed to take it. Here’s your shilling. Take it and go. A shilling indeed! More than half of it is Charity. Don’t let me see your face again

till Saturday next. Well---why don't you go? What are you stopping for?'

'I owe for three weeks' rent---seven and sixpence. Where am I to find seven and sixpence? All this week I have only earned three and eightpence, counting this shilling. Three shillings and eightpence! Three and eightpence! Think of trying to live on three and eightpence for a whole week! When I've paid one week's rent, there is one and two-pence left for food.'

'You have only got what you deserved to get. You have made your bed. Now lie upon it.'

'Oh! Cornelia, have you no pity?'

'You are a disgrace to the family. Pity? Don't I give you work and a shilling a week? Isn't that Christian Forgiveness?'

'Let me go and ask Claudia.'

'No. You shall not trouble Claudia. If you venture to trouble Claudia or Lucius it will be the worse for you. Get work. It is all you can do. Go away, I say, and look for work.'

The woman came out, walking slowly and with bent figure. She was no longer young, but her face was still sweet and must once have been beautiful. Now it was pinched with privation and heavy with trouble. She was very poorly dressed: in a black gown with some kind of jacket mournful in decay and a very battered bonnet. Althea ran to meet her, taking her by both hands, the tears in her eyes.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘I heard all. Why—why—did you not come to tell me? I might have done something.’

‘She won’t let me. I am never to go on the other side at all for fear I should meet Claudia and Lucius or be recognised by the children. Oh! as if my own sister would recognise me now—let alone the children, who have never seen me!’

‘Then I will come to you since you must not come to me. I cannot pay your rent for you because I have no money at all—no—not a shilling in the world. But we can talk and

perhaps we shall find out a way somehow. Good-bye. Go home straight. I will come to you presently.'

The poor woman walked slowly away. Laurence looked on wondering, not knowing what this might mean. Then Althea joined him again with the manner of one who wished the late incident to be regarded as closed.

'Come,' she said. 'Let us go into the church.'

They found Aunt Cornelia sitting in a hard, straight-backed chair without arms, a chair of Penance, in the antechamber, Galilee or Pronaos—a large and comfortable room beautifully wainscoted with mahogany, now two hundred years old and more, and black, but lustrous. There was a religious obscurity in the place. The Pew-opener's chair was outside the doors of the church, and if Aunt Cornelia had been forming part of a grand concerted piece with a thousand eyes upon her she could not have sat with greater solemnity. As for the admonition she had just bestowed

upon her humble sister, that had left no ripple upon the serenity of her face. She sat with her hands in her lap, bolt upright, as one who knows her dignity. She was an officer of the church, which, with its pews, prayer-books, bibles, hassocks, curtains, cushions, beadle's mace, its tablets, its vestry, its cupboard with the Sacramental Plate, and its Registers, was all under her care. It has been observed concerning ladies of this profession, that whereas most women find repose impossible and must still be at work with needle or knitting, unless they are talking, reading, shopping, or at the Theatre, pew-openers are gifted with the power of sitting still without doing anything at all : and of sitting alone in and silence. They are, to be sure, generally old : they have, thanks to their office, no anxiety about the daily bread : their season of love and its alarms is over long ago : they are at rest : the calm of the church has entered into their souls : they desire no physical activity. Sailors of the old school, accustomed to long spells of calm and to long

hours of idle watch with the trade wind blowing steady and not a sail to change, used to arrive at a similar restfulness of soul.

Cornelia looked up as they entered from the Porch. She recognised them with a smile of welcome, or perhaps of pride. To be surprised by her lodger in the full discharge of her official duties was gratifying. Thus should every zealous servant be discovered !

‘Aunt Cornelia,’ said Althea, ‘I have brought Mr. Waller to see the church.’

‘I will show him the church,’ she said rising. ‘I dreamed last night that I was chopping wood. It is a sure sign of a stranger.’

She opened the door and led the way into the church within. The round-headed windows were filled with modern painted glass : there was a good deal of gilding about the East, over the altar hung a great painting : the pulpit and reading desk, organ gallery, and wherever room could be found for it, were covered with wood carvings of fruit and flowers. On the walls, between the windows,

hung tablets to the memory of dead parishioners. It is a very ancient parish : thousands of good citizens lie buried in its vaults : but the Great Fire burned the ashes of all who were there when it flamed through the church and changed the stone carvings and the splendid tombs into lime and powder. Half-a-dozen Lord Mayors, at least, lie here ; and Heaven only knows how many Aldermen, Common Councilmen, and Ancient Masters of the City Company which came here every year on its High Day.

Cornelia displayed the treasures of the church with the air—few pew-openers or vergers achieve it—of a lady showing her own picture gallery or library. She was at once modest and proud. Laurence followed her, admiring mechanically. Indeed, there are many Churches in London City more interesting than that of St. Leonard le Size, and it was not conceived in Wren's happiest mood. The young man was thinking of his cicerone. Cornelia was in the Church. Cannot a lady

be in the Church except in this humble position? Shameful! And his mother—remembering this little prim figure with the big head and the smooth black hair plastered flat to the sides and brought up behind the ear—could still believe that her cousins represented the Higher School of Manners. His mother, the most gracious, the best mannered lady in the Colony! And who was the Disgrace to her Family?

Cornelia led them back into the Porch. Laurence thought that they had seen everything. But she took out a candlestick from some secret recess and lit the candle in it, saying, severely, ‘You must see the Body before you go.’

The Body! Was there, then, going to be an Inquest? Perhaps: for at the appearance of the candlestick Althea fled.

Cornelia found a key upon her bunch and unlocked one of the mahogany panels which differed in no respect from the others, save that it had a keyhole, invisible, except by the

light of a candle. When the panel was opened it disclosed, behind a sheet of glass six feet high, a dried-up body standing bolt upright, its head a little bent and its eyelids cast down, as if ashamed of being seen in such a withered, naked, helpless, imprisoned condition, its flesh long since shrivelled and dead, the skin clinging tight to the bones, its cheeks fallen in, its lips, thin and white, drawn tightly over the projecting teeth.

‘Good Heavens!’ cried Laurence. ‘What are you going to do with a mummy?’

‘He was found,’ said Cornelia, changing the position of the candle so as to bring out the best points of the Body, ‘in the vaults when they were examined before bricking them up for good. The other corpses were gone to bones and dust, but this one, you see, was somehow preserved. He dried up. Because it was such a curious thing they brought him up and made a cupboard for him behind the wainscoting. A beautiful Body he is, to be sure. Six feet high he must have been,

with a very fine leg of his own, they tell me. And there's an arm for you!' The shrivelled limb with the skin tight to the bone hung at his side. 'There's a breadth of shoulder. I wonder sometimes who he was: not a common person, to be buried in the vaults. Perhaps a Lord Mayor or the Master of a Company. He's worn a gold chain in his time and sat in a chair of office. Well,' she sighed, holding the candle before the bent head still covered with lank hair, 'I dare say his eyes were young once, like yours, young man.' Laurence shuddered. 'As he is now, so shalt thou be. Then go away and think of me. He is company for me while I am sitting alone here, especially in the dusk. I think there's two of us in the church to look after it—him and me. Many a time I light the candle and unlock the panel just to look at him and to give him a little light. Little do the people think when they come here of a Sunday—they do come—sometimes I've counted as many as thirteen at service, all at

once—I say—little do they think what is behind the wainscot. Sometimes I long to open the door and show them what we've got here. You're a beauty, you are!' She bobbed the candle up and down so that the light produced the appearance of what we call play of feature—and it was very ghastly. 'As he is now, so shall they be. Then let them go away and think of—of he.' She stroked the glass with her hand and tenderly patted it as if she were patting the cheek of the Body in order to cheer and comfort him in his long imprisonment. Then she sighed regretfully as one who laments that friends must part, blew out the candle, and locked the panel.

There was nothing more to show. She had done her duty. She retired to her chair and resumed her seat, her lips pursed, her hands crossed in her lap, as if the interview were over and she must now be left to continue her silent watch over the empty church with her brother guardian the Body. Laurence left her sitting watchful and silent in

this place of shadows. Without, he found Althea waiting for him, clothed with sunshine. Within, age, shadow, silence, and death presented in its most hideous form. Without, youth and light, sunshine and beauty.

‘Do you know,’ he asked, ‘this dreadful thing they have got there?’

‘I saw it once,’ she replied shuddering.

‘And she sits there all day with that awful Body close beside her?’

‘All day long and every day. The church is always open and no one ever goes into it. She is always alone. She likes the Body. Hush! Cassie once found her sitting in front of the open panel with two candles, and she was talking to the Body.’

‘I should not be surprised to learn that on dark days the Body walked out of the cupboard and that they took a turn together in the vaults below. But that she should sit and talk to it—I wonder what the Body talks about. However, it fully accounts for Aunt Cornelia’s pale face.’

‘Shall we go on with Thames Street?’

‘Shall we shut the book of history here? Aunt Cornelia has put me off the antiquities of Thames Street. Sometimes—don’t you think so?—the Living are more interesting than the Dead. She sits in the dark empty church all day and she talks to a Body behind a glass. And she blows up the unfortunate Disgrace to the Family—the Family!’ He remembered suddenly that it was his own. ‘Who is she? Who is she? You know her. Who is the Disgrace, and what is her name?’

‘I have seen her here and I have gone to her lodgings with her. She is horribly, dreadfully poor. That is all I know about her. She does not like to talk about herself, but I am sure she is in some way connected with the Cottles.’

‘Curious! She reminded me—but that is absurd. The longer I stay in Bank Side, Miss Indagine, the more interesting the place becomes. Think how great must be the dignity of the Cottles since it will not suffer

the Disgrace to be within walking distance. The Disgrace! She interests me greatly. May I be permitted—will you suffer me—to pay the poor thing's arrears of rent for her? Thank you very much. This poor Disgrace! Thank you very much. I have had a most delightful afternoon. Everything was new to me. Cornelia's church: and the Disgrace: and the Body—I do hope the Body enjoyed the little change of having his panel opened. You will tell me, won't you, Miss Indagine?—about the Disgrace. Do not, please—I entreat you—do not let her want. Did you notice what a soft voice she had and what a sweet face? She reminded me—somehow—she made me think—of my own mother.'

CHAPTER VII

SUNDAY MORNING

AT a quarter before eleven on the Sunday morning there is wafted across the river the mingled cling-clang-clash of a hundred bells—made melodious by the soft influence of distance—from St. Dunstan's in the West to St. Dunstan's in the East or even St. George's, Ratcliffe. They call the London citizens to church, as they have called them for a thousand years. Alas! These citizens hear no more the pious call. Along the leafy lanes of Weybridge, on the breezy *chaussée* of Hampstead Heath, over the turf of Wimbledon, across the furzy common of Barnes, everywhere—all round London—they are moving Churchwards obedient to the harsh tinkle of the little bell in the perky new

suburban church: but the loud tongue of the sonorous City bell strikes not upon their ears.

On the South side also they are not without their bells. They ring out lustily from the pinnacles of St. Mary Overy, from the tall needle of Horselydown, from the squab tower of St. Tooley and from St. George of the merry Borough. They make altogether—the bells of the City and the bells of the Borough—such a ringing, resonant, rolling consonation and concert of invitation, that one feels how mean and poor-spirited must be the creature who would refuse to enter a church after this magnificent overture, and how very much to be pitied is the poor Dissenter, who hath no part or share in it, and no such preliminary heart-awakener played for him on his way to Chapel. Yet the Churches—both of City and of Borough—are reported to be generally empty.

Laurence stood at the head of the stairs, gazing across the river. He was soothing his

spirit in the manner customary to young men after breakfast. It may be observed that no opposition was now made to the profanation of the Academy by the use of the weed at any time. Suspicion of all kinds had wholly vanished. The lodger had subdued all hearts. Even the punchbowl was restored to its place without anxiety: relations of a truly fraternal character were established with the girls: this young man, in fact, carried so much cheerfulness about him that he could communicate some of it to everybody and never feel the loss. Cornelia herself regarded him with friendly eyes. But this morning his face, usually so cheerful, was touched with anxiety.

Beside him, on the wooden bench of that rough belvedere already spoken of, sat Cassie. She was so daintily dressed in her Sunday 'Things' that she ought to have felt and looked happy. Alas! a pretty bonnet and a becoming costume will cause a girl to forget a good many things—long hours of work,

nagging, an empty purse, an insufficient dinner—but under certain afflictions even the consolations of dress fail. Cassie carried her prayer-book; presumably therefore she was going to Church, but she hardly looked as if the consolations of religion would greatly help her. Dark circles ringed her eyes: her soft cheeks were pale: her rosebud lips were set hard: her shapely head was drooping. These were signs of distress; of storm; perhaps of temper. Laurence glanced at her from time to time with anxious eyes, but said nothing. He was wise. If you want a girl to tell you a thing, leave it unquestioned. Then that thing will grow and swell up within her mind until it must be spoken and further reticence is impossible.

While the rolling and the riot of the bells were at their highest, Lucius came forth from the house. He was dressed in black, brushed with neatness. His father always showed his respect for Sunday by wearing black, and he was not the man to bring contempt upon his

ancestors by changing any old customs. When George the Fourth was king, great merchants,—ay, and great lawyers, both of the Higher and the Lower Branch—always went to church in black. The custom still survives on Bank Side and elsewhere. If, for instance, you watch a row of houses in the respectable suburb of Stratford or Mile End a little before Church time, you will presently observe a swarming of families in the direction of Church or Chapel: you will also observe that the head of each family is clothed from head to foot in black. This fashion, however, is going out: a few short years more and it will have vanished—gone to the limbo of all bygone fashions. With the Sunday black Lucius assumed an air of more individual responsibility and greater dignity. This is natural, and even praiseworthy. Man is a slave all the week: on Sunday he is free: he goes to Church as a voluntary act: he goes to his office or shop because he must. Besides, on Sunday he goes before the Lord of all, who

will presently redress every injustice. This thought uplifts his heart and straightens his back.

‘I trust, Mr. Waller,’ he said, crossing the road, and looking with visible apprehension at his daughter, ‘that you go to Church. Some young men, I learn in Chambers—we in Chambers learn a great deal of the outer world—are conspicuous, lamentably conspicuous, for the neglect of that duty.’

Laurence replied briefly that at Sydney he went to Church regularly. He remarked that the manner of the little man betrayed a state of great nervous agitation. He naturally connected this with Cassie’s stormy looks. The girl, for her part, at the appearance of her father, turned her head away and looked across the river. This gesture Laurence made haste to connect with a family row.

‘My dear,’ said Lucius, with apprehensive voice, ‘your sister is now drawing on her gloves. You are also ready, I hope, for the . . . the calm and tranquillity of Church?’

Cassie made no reply. The wise man bows before the feminine mood: Lucius did not press the question. He turned to Laurence instead.

‘To give,’ he said, endeavouring to assume a judicial calm, ‘moral support to the Establishment is the duty of every good Englishman. It was my father’s unbending rule. For my own part, since the official connection of my sister with the Church of St. Leonard le Size, I have supported the Establishment by a weekly morning attendance there. The congregations are scanty, but the sermons appeal to the reason. I hope, Mr. Waller, that we may see you amongst us some day.’

He walked away without appearing to notice his daughter’s defiant and rebellious attitude, delicately and carefully, as one who would not stain or spot his silver buckles or white silk stockings with the dust and mud of the road.

Then Flavia came out, buttoning her gloves and accompanied by her brother. She

was dressed, like Cassie, in her best bonnet and her Sunday frock. They made Cassie look prettier, but they only made her look more prim and formal.

Sempronius ran across the road.

‘Come along, Cass,’ he said.

Cassie turned her shoulder again.

‘You’ve had your flare-up,’ said the horrid boy. ‘Take and have done with it. What’s the use of being cross with Flavia? She’s done nothing.’

Cassie returned no reply. Then Flavia herself came across.

‘Are you going to St. Leonard’s, Flavia?’ Laurence asked.

It will be observed that he had by this time arrived at the Christian name, which is a great step, and shows that confidence is firmly established. If you spend most of your evenings with friendly girls, and are yourself easy and sympathetic and ready to make advances, it is not difficult to arrive quickly at the Christian name.

‘No, Mr. Waller, we are not going to St. Leonard’s. Father goes because he makes himself believe that it is grand for Aunt Cornelia to be a pew-opener. We don’t; we go to St. Saviour’s. Come, Cassie, if you are going too, it is time to start.’

Cassie shook her head impatiently.

‘Well — but you needn’t keep in a temper.’

‘Leave her alone, Flavia,’ said Laurence. ‘Go on to church and we will join you presently.’

‘I’ve got to call for Althea. You can follow if you like.’

‘Oh! If Miss Indagine goes with you——’

‘Of course,’ said Flavia, not lightly, but seriously, ‘if she is going you will go too.’ She walked away before Laurence fully understood what the meaning of her words might be. But they brought a slight suffusion to his cheek.

Then the bells left off ringing and a sweet silence fell upon the Bank. All those who go

to church were by this time within the sacred walls. Those who do not go to church—it is said these unhappy persons are in the majority—were lying in bed. Those who live in the Liberty of the Clink and its vicinity mostly lie in bed all Sunday morning. Whether they go to church in the evening or not is doubtful. Perhaps, in the great ugly barracks of Red Cross Street, where so many thousands are bestowed, there are House or College Chapels where they hold services of prayer and praise. Otherwise one fears—— However, Bank Side at the hour of Morning Prayer is as quiet as if St. Saviour's was crammed and the walls of all the Dissenting Chapels were bulging with pressure of worshippers.

Laurence knocked out the ashes of his pipe.

‘Cassie, old chap,’ he said, ‘there’s been a shindy of some sort, I perceive.’

‘It was all my fault,’ she burst out. ‘Oh! I’ve got such a horrid temper. But I didn’t mean what I said. They ought to know that

I didn't mean it. Oh, I'm so miserable that I don't know what I did say.'

'Come, you promised last night that you'd tell me all about it. Better tell me than fly in a rage with your own people. Flavia has done nothing, as Sempronius said.'

She hung her head and made no reply.

'Isn't it better to have it out with me than to spoil their pleasure at home?'

She was still silent.

'I'm as hard as nails. Hit me and hammer me. I shan't mind. If you feel like it, box my ears. Nobody's looking.'

She shook her head.

'Well, then, if you won't tell me anything, shall we get up and go to church with the others? But church in such a frame of mind as this . . . really, Cassie.'

The girl had risen when he proposed to go to church. Now she sat down again and burst into tears.

'The air is fresh this morning, and the

sun is warm,' said Laurence, looking another way. 'It is, perhaps, better for us to be here than in church, particularly if you are going to talk to me. St. Paul's looks splendid in the sunshine. If you come to think of it, there isn't a better place for a quiet talk in the whole of London than Bank Side on a fine summer morning, is there? Nobody to disturb us: a comfortable bench, which might be cleaner, to sit down upon: a fine warm air: and the river at our feet.'

Cassie went on sobbing and crying, regardless of Wren's masterpiece and ungrateful for the sunshine.

'I don't know,' Laurence continued, unheeding, 'whether I don't prefer this sunshine to the moonlight. Of course——' He went on talking as if the girl was in that mood for sympathetic listening which makes women who can command it so dangerous to unprotected man. 'Of course, Cassie, I shall always think that the sunset is the finest time for Bank Side, especially when two goddesses come

down from Heaven in a golden shell. Last night the moon was riding in great splendour over the river, wasn't she? I mean when I came out at ten, and found you leaning over the wall and looking at it.'

She made no reply ; but she left off crying and dried her eyes.

'That is,' he explained, 'you were not looking at it ; you were crying into the river, just as you are doing now. It made a dangerously high tide, this morning. Cassie, my child, you promised to tell me all about it—you know you did. You said you would tell me this very morning ; whereas, on the contrary, instead of having it over first and crying over it afterwards, you have been mixing up the proper order. You've sent your father to church all of a tremble, as they say, and you've bullied your inoffensive sister. Come, Cassie' (he laid a fraternal hand on hers), 'all the week through you've been miserable, pretending to be jolly when you fancied a fellow was looking at you——'

‘I thought,’ said Cassie simply, ‘that you only had eyes for Althea.’

‘Why do you think that?’ Laurence asked, a blush upon his manly cheek.

‘You are always with her. You go out upon the river together : you walk with her : you spend your evenings with her at home : you follow her with your eyes——’

‘Yes—yes—enough said, Cassie.’

‘How can anybody wonder?’

‘Anybody wonder?’ he echoed.

‘There isn’t in the whole world,’ said Cassie loyally, ‘another such a girl as Althea.’

‘I begin to be quite certain that there isn’t. In fact—I’ve been quite certain for some little time. There, Cassie—you have my secret : give me your own in exchange.’

‘My own—my secret. Oh ! It is nothing. It is not worth telling.’

‘You are in trouble,’ he said. ‘Have you told Flavia?’

‘No.’

‘Nor Althea?’

‘No. I have told Althea——’ she paused.
‘I have told Althea—what was not the truth.’

‘Perhaps if you tell me exactly what you told her I shall be able to reverse the statement and so get at the truth.’

‘I cannot tell you. Oh!’—she burst into tears once more. ‘I am so miserable—so dreadfully unhappy. I wish I could die. I never thought I would be so unhappy. And nobody can help—nobody—not even you—though you seem to be helping everybody—Mr. Indagine and all.’

‘Cannot I help you too?’

‘No—no.’

‘I must guess then. Listen, Cassie, and tell me if I am right. There was once a girl—a very pretty girl she was—very pretty indeed—like you in that respect.’ Cassie smiled through her tears—a weak, wan, December smile. ‘She lived just as you do in a—a—yes—a romantic house beside the river far from the usual haunts of people, so that she had very few friends. She belonged, like

you, to a most respectable family. Her father, just like yours—was a lawyer—in the Higher Branch—a Barrister.’

‘Father is a Barrister’s clerk,’ said Cassie.

‘Oh!’ This discovery was a blow even harder to bear than the discovery of Cornelia’s real relations with the Church. A barrister’s clerk! So much dignity: such a carriage: such conversation: such an eighteenth-century manner—and only a clerk—a barrister’s clerk! It seemed impossible. Cornelia was in the Church—a pew-opener in the Church. Lucius was in the law—in the Higher Branch—a clerk in the Higher Branch. Where was the family greatness? But there remained the Prophetess. He would still hope something from the Prophetess.

‘To be sure’—he dissimulated the weight of the blow—‘I meant Barrister’s clerk. Like your father, I said, in the Higher Branch. That, you see, was the point of similarity. In the Higher Branch. As for respectability, this girl, like you, actually had a grandfather.

The ghost of her grandfather—so great was their respectability—still lingered on the scene of his former family happiness. At night he sat upon the chest of drawers in the Best Bedroom, and if any fellow smoked a pipe in the room he used to cough and say “Tcheehee! Tcheehee! You violate the Sanctity of the Academy.”’

Cassie looked uncertain whether she ought to laugh. Was it possible to laugh at her grandfather—Vicesimus Cottle?

‘In a street near theirs was a house to which a young man belonged’—Cassie here coloured violently—‘a dark-haired young man—a very remarkable young man to look at—he had a clever face, with very bright black eyes. And the young man cast eyes of admiration upon this pretty girl and presently told her that he loved her—that he loved her,’ Laurence repeated. ‘So far it is a beautiful story, because the girl began to love him in return and to think about him a great deal—I dare say all day and night.

Then he gave her presents, just to mark his love, and promised fidelity and went away. He was abroad—how long?’

‘Six months,’ Cassie murmured.

‘He was absent for six months. Then he came back to London and got an appointment and did something fine which made people talk of him and expect great things of him. So that the girl grew prouder of him every day.’

‘Every day,’ Cassie murmured.

‘And he seemed to love her as much as ever.’

‘At first, as much as ever,’ she repeated.

‘Which, of course, was not to be wondered at, because she was a girl so pretty and so good. He wrote her beautiful letters, not only while he was away, but also after he came home.’

‘Oh! he did—he did—the most beautiful letters you can imagine.’

‘And then—then,’ Laurence hesitated,

‘he grew less affectionate. Gradually. She did not observe it at first—by degrees.’

‘No—no—no,’ Cassie cried, ‘it was not by degrees: it was suddenly. Oh! there was no sign of any change. It was all of a sudden—without any warning at all. He loved me in the evening and in the morning he loved me no longer. What had I done—what had I done—to make such a change?’

‘Nothing at all.’

‘In the evening he held my hand in his and kissed me and wouldn’t let me go, and the next day he wrote me a cruel dreadful letter, saying that it was all a mistake, and as for love, he found he had been quite wrong, because he did not love me at all. That was a week ago. Now you know why I have looked miserable. And oh! oh! Mr. Waller, what could I have done or said to break off all his love for me in a single moment?’

‘Nothing at all,’ he said a second time.

‘He did love me—I saw it in his eyes—I

felt it when he touched me. How *can* a man love a girl in the evening and hate her in the morning?’

‘He cannot,’ said Laurence.

‘Could anyone have told him anything? But there was nothing to tell. And I have no enemies. If we have no friends, we have no enemies. There is not a single person who would do me a mischief—I am certain there is not.’

‘No one has done you a mischief, except the man himself, Cassie.’

‘Oh, I am so miserable. I cannot tell anybody. I am afraid to tell Flavia. No one can help me. It is so shameful—so dreadful—to be thrown away like a thing you want no more. And he will never—never—never love me again.’

‘If I were you,’ said Laurence, ‘since the man has acted like a blackguard’—the girl winced as if she had been struck with a whip—‘a blackguard, I say,—best face the truth—I would put him out of my mind alto-

gether.' This he said, ignorant of woman's heart.

'I cannot—oh! I cannot. And please don't call him hard names. It hurts me even that you should think hardly of him. Though he will never love me again—never—never—never.'

Laurence looked across the river with great determination, trying to fix his eyes—which were a little hazy, no doubt with the freshness of the breeze—on the golden cross of St. Paul's.

'My dear child,' he said presently, 'I guessed what was going on. As for the reason—there can be but one. Has Oliver transferred his valuable affections to someone else?' He remembered the comedietta seen from the Bridge. 'Has he told the same tale to another girl?'

'No—no. He thinks of nothing but his Laboratory and his science. He only told me—oh! it was cruel—that I could console myself with—— I cannot say it.'

‘Was it with me, Cassie? That was—bad form’—his face betrayed a stronger phrase. ‘Very bad form indeed. Poor little girl! I am very sorry. If you think that he was jealous——’

‘No—no—no. He was not jealous. Nobody could be jealous when you only have eyes for Althea.’

‘What did you tell Althea?’

‘She suspected something—I don’t know why’—lovers are exactly like the fabled bird of the desert who hides his head in the sand and thinks himself invisible—‘and she asked me, and I told her a falsehood. I said that nothing had passed between Oliver and me.’

‘Does no one know at home?’

She shook her head. There had been no signs, of course—nothing at all—which should make her sister suspect. No walks with Oliver in the evening: no tell-tale glances: no blushes: and now no tears and misery. Of course no one suspected and no one knew.

I suppose that Laurence was too young

and inexperienced to know how great a disaster had fallen upon this unfortunate damsel. If a woman throws over her lover he recovers in time from his rage and disappointment and discovers that there are other women in the world quite as good as the one who has refused him. It is only in the penny novelette that a man hurls himself to the devil because a woman throws him over. Nor indeed, in a similar position, does a woman die of a broken heart. She lives. But she is wounded and the scars do not heal. She never finds another completely to take the place of the one who has deserted her. She promised herself to him : she gave him her heart : she showed to him the secrets of her soul : she took the image and thought of him into her mind, thinking that they would dwell there all her life : she loved the man, apart from the accidents of his comeliness, his strength, his genius, his birth, his reputation : he was the one man in all the world to her : whatever he might do, whether he should succeed or

whether he should fail, mattered only to her so far as it should make him happy or miserable: it was enough for her that the man loved her: for her he was white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand: his head as the most fine gold: his mouth most sweet: yea, altogether lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem! To a woman there is no misery in the world more dreadful: there is no blow of fate more bitter: than the loss of her lover. He loves her no more: then she is no longer beautiful, no longer sweet: her very self-respect is torn from her: all her future—the splendid sunlit mist which wraps the future of a girl who has a lover—is destroyed: she is no longer one of the happy and endless procession which walks two by two across the stage of Life: yet she has left the crowd of maidens who wait together for their lovers: and she must now walk alone. Alas! poor Cassie!

Laurence began to whisper such words of consolation as he could find. What words?

What consolation? The girl was bereaved. In bereavement who can console? The Art of Consolation has not yet been discovered. Nothing can console unless it be forgetfulness: wherefore the bottle, in some cases—but this is elementary. We look for an anæsthetic of the heart under which we shall suffer bereavement without pain and lie sleeping till the sharpness and agony are overpast. ‘I cannot bear it,’ cries the widow. ‘Then, Madam,’ says the physician, ‘what will you do?’ ‘He has left me: he loves me no longer: I cannot bear it,’ said Cassie. ‘Then, child,’ said Laurence, ‘what will you do?’

Well: but only to cry out is something: to tell somebody else is a relief: to weep in solitude is to shed tears of rage and despair. If anybody will explain why Cassie found a greater relief in confessing to a brand-new friend, and that a young man, than in confessing to her old friend Althea or to her sister, he will throw fresh light upon the female character.

They sat together on the shabby old bench among the barges and the heaps of scrap-iron and the cranes. Laurence told stories, all out of his own head, concerning the folly of girls who continue to think of men after they have proved themselves worthless : how their youth is wasted in melancholy and their age consumed by regrets : and of the wickedness of bestowing continued love upon men who do not deserve that supreme gift, and how to youth such love brings no happiness and to age it brings repentance. No one would believe that so young a man could be so eloquent on such a theme. Hard it is upon the historian that he cannot spare the space for so admirable a discourse. Unhappily it produced no effect—not the least in the world. Cassie loved this man : it is the way of a woman. Solomon himself could not understand it : and it was too wonderful even for Agur the son of Jakeh. She loved the man whether he was worthless or not. She would gladly have arisen to go forth with him to the

ends of the world, even if he went on getting worse and worse. She would love him and be unhappy—yet less unhappy than if she had been separated from him. Therefore, Laurence spoke as one that beateth the air.

Then he changed his line and spoke of Time—Time the Healer. He called it Time the Healer. It is a very old commonplace and it is not at all true. Time cannot heal anything. Time can only destroy. Time destroys regrets and remembrance and kindness and affection: just as the dentist deadens the nerve. Time at last destroys the scars—when he destroys the frame itself.

But, even while Laurence discoursed, an image grew up in the girl's mind which soothed if it did not console her: it was suggested by the mention of Time as a Physician: she figured herself, in the distant future, a sad and interesting creature: bowed down with the weight of that one sorrow: she thought she should never be able to lose that sorrow: she saw herself nursing her grief: she saw

her own drooping frame and heavy head—and the thought of the misery to come consoled the misery of the present.

About half-past eleven the poet came forth in his brown velvet jacket and his felt hat. But his head was lifted proudly and his shoulders were no longer bent : in imagination he was standing alone in the centre of the world, with the eyes of a boundless multitude upon him ; a multitude composed of every race who speak the Saxon tongue : they gazed upon him, pointed at him, and applauded him. Laurence, to whom he kindly nodded, was but one of this crowd. He walked through a lane of imaginary admirers with firm step and countenance unmoved till he came to the Bridge Stairs. Then he left the Bank and was joined on the Bridge by the Chevalier, with whom he walked every Sunday morning, after this official had peeled the potatoes and taken the Sunday dinner to the bakehouse.

When St. Paul's struck a quarter-past twelve Cassie got up and said she would go

to meet them coming out of church. She led Laurence to the end of Bank Street, where once stood the noble House of Winchester, though the street is called after the ancient Clink. It is the narrowest and the deepest street in the whole of London : it is like a long mine underground, or a deep and dark cañon in the rock : bridges cross it : warehouses rises on either hand : if a cart comes along the passenger must turn and fly : if two carts meet one must be backed out. There is a damp and sour smell in it which never leaves the street even on the Sunday. Close to the end of it is the ancient port beside which stood the little chapel before the Normans came and made their great monastery and built St. Mary Overy's Church, now called St. Saviour's.

On Sunday they have swept up and cleaned the market-place in front of the church, but there still lingers in the air the fragrance of crushed cabbage-stalks, bruised onions, pea-shucks, decaying apples and the like. But

the place is quiet. Cassie went to the south door leading into the church, and they waited beside the monument of the illustrious Lockyer—the man of the Pill—until the others should come out.

‘Have I said anything—anything at all, Cassie, to comfort and to help you?’

‘No,’ she replied, truthfully, ‘nothing at all. But you are kind. If I had not told someone I think I must have gone mad.’

‘Won’t you tell Althea?’

‘Oh, no, no! I want to tell no one. Let it all be forgotten. Hush! there is the organ. They will come out now.’

Then the scanty congregation came out of the church: Althea and Flavia by the steps which lead from the new nave to the ancient transept; and they walked home together—Laurence beside Flavia, Cassie with Althea—through the narrow and winding ways. By this time the residents of Red Cross Street were up and dressed and collecting in the street against the opening of the Houses, so

that the beauty of the day seemed gone. But Cassie was tranquil again, the first paroxysm of impatience over. Flavia observed this result and glanced anxiously at the face of her companion, not daring to ask what he had been told. The face was graver than was customary on account of this communication. She thought it was because Laurence was considering what was best to be done—having by this time perfect confidence in his power to do something. It was in the nature of this young man to inspire vast confidence. Something! It is the word which Hope always whispers in the ear—fond, foolish, sympathetic Hope! You have lost your place; there is only a month or so between yourself and starvation. Hope whispers, ‘Something will turn up. Be of good cheer.’ You are ruined. ‘Heart up,’ says Hope, ‘something will happen.’ Your disease grows worse: your case is well-nigh desperate. ‘Courage,’ says Hope. ‘Something will be found for you. That is not Azrael whose wing you

hear. It is the guardian angel who brings you health.'

But Laurence was not thinking what should be done. In such a case nothing can be done. The exhibition of the common cow-hide would only make the offender hate the girl with a more bitter hatred. Nothing could be done. But he was wondering what Oliver meant by it. Always he saw before him that little drama that was played below the bridge; and his face hardened and his eyes glared only to think that Althea—Althea—Althea—should be wooed by this young expounder of the latest and the worst Philosophy—the most despairing and the most destructive.

CHAPTER VIII

SUNDAY EVENING

It was on the evening of this memorable day that Laurence first saw Claudia—who prophesied. Her name, he found, was not often mentioned in the family circle, because religious opinion separated her from her sister. Cornelia—the thing was due to her official position—could not in decency recognise Dissent in any form, nor could she encourage any religious Function which is not conducted according to the formularies of the Church of England. Now there is no form of prayer prescribed for those who prophesy. None has survived from the time of the early Church. The other members of the household, including her brother Lucius, regarded the Prophetess with a certain pride :

notwithstanding the originality and daring of her opinion, she sustained and even advanced the greatness of the family. Flavia, indeed, went farther. This young woman, who possessed the desirable gift of independence, openly maintained the doctrine that the New Testament Believers' Borough Branch—led by her Aunt Claudia—could not be dislodged from their position by any arguments. They had, in fact, repeatedly challenged argument, and as the challenge was never taken up even by the clergy of the parish, it was clear that no one was able to answer them. She therefore attended the Chapel every Sunday evening, and looked confidently for a time when the gift of prophecy should be bestowed, as in early days, upon all believers. She also attended the tea parties, lectures, confessions of experience, prayer meetings, and the other gatherings by which the life of the community was sustained.

It is obviously the first duty of every Sect, Church, Connection, or Persuasion to

establish on a firm basis its claim to possess the Truth. Fortunately, no Church has ever been started which could not prove so much, at least, with the greatest ease. If one thinks of it, there is not a single Sect whose position is not absolutely impregnable. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Bible Christian, Jezreelite, Quaker, Shaker—every one dwells in a strong fortress, in which he is secure from every enemy. When the faithful are fully persuaded of this comfortable fact, it is the next business of the leaders to reward their followers by providing for them emotions various and pleasing, excitement, and fraternal love—which last often deepens into something deeper, and even changes its character altogether. Perhaps it was this side of the chapel which attracted Flavia. Her life was narrow and dull: her work at St. Martin's over, there was nothing at all left for the rest of the day. She was not a girl who could find her chief amusement in reading, and there were no books to read except those

borrowed by her brother. Like most girls who have thrown over the domestic life, she could not sit down every evening to sew and make things in linen and flannel, nor could she find absolute happiness in the decoration of an old hat with new ribbons: she had no lover, nor did any thoughts of love enter into her head. The dulness of her life was only an unfelt force: it did not weigh upon her: she was not actively discontented: but the Chapel offered her a change. Heavens! how great a change! It opened for her the gates of the New Jerusalem that she might look through, though as yet she might not enter. Here she felt the yearning after the unknown, the rapture of the foretaste, the sense of special guidance—which may, and does, fall upon the humblest Chapel member as fully as upon the most saintly recluse of the cave, or upon the most illustrious princess in the most splendid cloister. In the morning she went to Church with her sister: it was part of her routine: besides, she was not above

the gratification of sitting in her Sunday best among other people also in Sunday best. But in the evening she sought the Chapel of Huldah the Prophetess.

Flavia was accompanied every Sunday evening by no less a personage than the Chevalier. This exile was not only a rebel to his King but to his Church. Concerning both he held such views and used such figures of speech as are common among rebels. In the humble connection of the New Testament Believers, in the little Chapel where they met, in the lowly company there gathered together, the Professor of the New Humanity saw a return to Primitive Christianity, a spark of light in the darkness which should spread and grow until it should illumine the whole world, the Hope of the future, the Salvation of mankind. The other disciples knew themselves to be the one little flock in All the World who held the Truth : it was enough for them. This revolutionary saw a great deal more. Here all were equal

to begin with : there was no authority : they had no creed : they were governed by no laws : they all had in their hands the Acts of the Apostles—the work on which, as everybody knows, the Connection chiefly bases its opinions—and could read and judge for themselves. Such a religion, pure, democratic, free, suits such a Social order as the Chevalier burned to establish.

It was strange : the man who had spent the best years of his life in conspiring for the overthrow of Governments, the downfall and death of Kings, the destruction of Church, Property, Rank, and distinction, in company with the murderous, treacherous, self-seeking reptiles who are always attracted by conspiracy and the hope of plunder : who cared nothing for bloodshed if only his schemes could succeed : who had fought on barricades and shot down his enemies without any subsequent pang of remorse : who still, after forty years had passed, and at seventy years of age, would rather have had presented to

him the Hapsburg's head upon a charger than any gift of worldly goods : who was of a proud and ancient family : who had consorted with gentlefolk and scholars : now walked humbly and in rags beside this humble London girl, to a little Chapel whose worshippers were the lowliest of all those who read and think for themselves. No greater contrast could be imagined than that of the pair thus walking together : the old man with his white locks, his soft mild eyes and gentle manner, his ragged coat and flat cloth cap, and with all these memories clinging to him, beside the girl, so neat, so proper, so ostentatiously respectable—Cornelia would have said so genteel, but the word is falling into disuse.

‘ We are going to Aunt Claudia's Chapel, Mr. Waller,’ said Flavia. ‘ Will you come too?’

Laurence hesitated. He had entertained visions of a dinner at a West End Restaurant ; after an occasional dip into the West End one

returns with renewed heart to the simplicity of Bank Side : Sunday evening is not lively among the barges : he had spent three nights running with the Poet and Althea and could hardly in decency go there again for a day or two : and all day long Cassie's words about his wandering eyes had been in his mind : he wanted to get away alone and to ask himself solemnly what it meant and whether he really—and whether she had the least suspicion—and what his mother would say—and so on. In times of difficulty one always longs for this solitary colloquy with self, and it never, never, never comes off, because it is so difficult to place our own affairs before ourselves plainly, without deception or illusion—and when a man resolves his hardest to take a calm and dispassionate view of the position he only succeeds in falling into dreams.

‘Come with us,’ Flavia repeated.

‘Sir,’ said the Chevalier, ‘if you stay at Bank Side without witnessing its chief glory you do yourself an injustice.’

Laurence wished to do an injustice to no man, least of all to himself. He hesitated no longer.

‘The new Humanity,’ said the Chevalier, ‘demands a reformed religion. Primitive Christianity alone is able to satisfy its aspirations and its wants. You do not know perhaps,’ he added in the sweetest and softest voice possible, a voice of velvet, ‘that the little Fraternity of our Chapel is the revival of that sweet and holy religion.’

‘No, I did not know it,’ said Laurence. ‘Are you, too, Chevalier, a disciple?’

‘I, too. After many years. I have lived a philosopher: I shall die a Christian. In my youth, like many others, I confounded the false with the true: your cathedrals, your Bishops, your priests—they are not Christianity. What that is—we will show you.’

‘Does your sister go with you, Flavia?’

‘No. She is crying in her own room. But she is not cross any more. You said something to her, Mr. Waller, that took away

her temper. Althea has been with her this afternoon, but she will not tell Althea anything—or me either. As if we did not know, Chevalier!’ She turned to her companion with that smile of bitter sweet triumph that a woman assumes when she has found out a secret.

‘Yes, we know,’ said the Chevalier.

‘In that case,’ said Laurence, ‘we all know it and so we need not say anything more.’

‘I have observed the face of that young man,’ said the Chevalier without naming him. ‘I, who have lived among men of action, have studied many faces and I have never yet been deceived by any face. The traitor I know, the flatterer also : the luxurious man and the self-indulgent : the liar and the heartless—I know them all. This young man has a bad face. He is false and treacherous : he is selfish : he has no pity.’

‘The last illusion which will perish,’ Laurence remembered, ‘is the illusion which we call love.’

Flavia set her lips and nodded her head vindictively. If Mr. Oliver Luttrell should ever fall into the hands of this young woman, Laurence thought, there would be a bad quarter of an hour for him. A political prisoner among the Carthaginian ladies after they had sharpened their nails would not have had a more unpleasant time.

The Chapel of the New Testament Believers is called by some the Upper Chamber and by some the House of Consolation, and among some it has a more sacred name still which may be left to the brethren. It is such a Chapel as may be met with everywhere in the poorer quarters: small, ugly, with a little window over the door and another window, round headed, at the end. It stands in Union Street, which is better known than most of the Southwark Streets, because one must pass through Union Street in order to reach Red Cross Street, where there is the most charming little settlement, or Colony, of culture and sweetness in all

London, not excepting the Brewers' Garden at the back of the London Hospital.

The Chapel was furnished with benches half filled with people: at the end was a low platform with a harmonium. Flavia and the Chevalier sat down near the door, nodding to some of the congregation. They all turned and gazed at the stranger in some astonishment. A well-dressed stranger does not often visit the Upper Chamber. Presently, one among them rose and advanced to him bearing a little bundle of tracts in his hands. He was a man of meek and gentle appearance and bright eyes.

‘Read them,’ he whispered earnestly. ‘They are intended for the Inquirers. You will see that our position is one that cannot be shaken. And they know it.’ He jerked his head to the right, perhaps he meant those of Westminster Abbey, or those of Lambeth Palace: but he did not explain. ‘Do not,’ he added, ‘resist the power of Truth. Let your heart be open to the voice of Truth.’

Just then the door opened and a woman appeared dressed in black silk. Upon her head was a kind of black mantilla which fell over her like a veil. She stood at the door for a moment and pushed back her veil with her hands, looking round the room as if to observe who were present. Her eyes fell upon Laurence and she started. Why did she start? Then the veil fell over her face again and she walked up the Chapel and mounted the platform, taking her seat in an armchair in the middle facing the congregation. This was Claudia. She was curiously like her sister Cornelia, yet with a difference. She had the family nose, but it was softened, so to speak, by a reduction in length and breadth. She was small of stature, like the rest of the family, but she was not stiff and angular like Cornelia. Although she was now fifty years of age she was still pleasant to look upon: her features were mobile: her hair was abundant and was rolled up in a kind of crown: her eyes were large and

lustrous: they should therefore have been sleepy eyes: but on the contrary they were curiously bright and keen. These observations were made during the short space when she stood in the door and looked round the Chapel: after the veil was dropped again her face was invisible.

Felix Laverock came into the Chapel after his mother. At the sight of Laurence he dropped into the farthest corner, hanging his head with every sign of confusion. Apparently, therefore, the gift of the mother had not also been granted to the son. Then the service began. There was a small desk at one side of the platform and a harmonium at the other.

The nonconformist service is always much the same whatever Truths are preached. They sing hymns: read and expound the Scriptures: the minister offers a long prayer: and then followeth the sermon.

In this case the sermon was not one of fire and wrath, but of praise and faith: with

simple and homely experiences: it was preached by one who, like a Quaker, spoke because he thought he had something to say. When he sat down another rose and said what was in his heart: and then another. Meantime the prophetess sat in the chair, motionless, her lace veil hiding her face, her hands in her lap. She did not sing with them: she seemed as if she did not pray with them. Laurence could not keep his eyes from her. He was affected with a strange sense of incongruity. How did this woman come here? She should have been wrapped in a peplum and been attached to the oracle of Delphi. So dumb, so still, so regardless of the folk, may have sat the priestess before the oracle was given.

Then he discovered, while the speakers poured out the thankfulness and joy of their hearts, that the people all seemed to have the same kind of eyes. No doubt there were grey, blue, brown and black eyes among the people: but their eyes were all curiously bright. This

kind of brightness goes with the variety of faith which scoffing would call credulity. It is the brightness of enthusiasm. Every crank has such eyes. You will see it in the leaders of mobs as well as in the Captains of the Salvation Army.

The last speaker left the beaten path of personal experience in order to consider the position of the Church—their Church. The discourse was clearly intended for the stranger within the gates, because the speaker looked at Laurence, and the people turned round and gazed at him to see how he would receive the Truth: whether he would take it fighting, or whether he would fall prostrate under its mighty influence and own that never before had he known what was the Truth or where that article was to be obtained. If he had been the Prince of Wales himself this stranger could not have been the object of greater curiosity.

The position, in fact, of the New Testament Believers is exactly that of the Primitive

Church as described in the earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The speaker pointed this out with great care. As in those days of simplicity and faith, so in the Connection all were equal—the brethren did look as if the average weekly wage was from thirty-five shillings to two pounds a week. As in the Early days, so in the Connection, if one were to grow rich—the thing seemed too remote to affect the imagination of the hearers—he would divide his wealth among all. There was true brotherly love among them—where else outside the Connection could that be found? They had no creed or formula, but all was done by faith. They had no priests, but all were equal. And as to the gift of Prophecy and Tongues, where, outside the Connection, could it be found at all—oh! where else—where else—than in this humble Chapel of a few chosen believers, snatched from the wilderness of the unbelieving world?

Flavia and the Chevalier nodded approv-

ingly as each point was made. When it came to the last Felix in his corner contorted his limbs and hung his head.

Then the harmonium played a few chords and the people began to sing, sitting in their places, a long chaunting monotonous hymn, which rose and fell, verse by verse, and produced a most strange effect upon one at least of the gathering. Laurence felt as if he were being mesmerised, or were inhaling laughing gas. Already he felt his head swim, his limbs tremble, his senses reel. Then the people sang their hymn louder and faster, and they caught hands and stood up, and some swayed their bodies to and fro in rhythm like children at a musical drill: and some leaped and some wept aloud and some laughed. The harmonium, meantime, kept playing a monotonous droning accompaniment. The prophetess sat motionless.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

Then the music stopped and the people became silent and sank down upon the benches,

panting, gasping, eager for the voice of Prophecy.

The woman tossed back her veil over her shoulders and threw out her arms.

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It lasted for ten minutes. It flowed like a cascade after rain: it was turbulent in its headlong rapidity. It seemed to issue from the lips but not from the brain: in this way the ancient priestess was wont to deliver the oracle as if it came not from herself. It was full of ejaculations and of Scripture phrases. It seemed to uplift the souls of those who listened with open mouth and kindling eyes: it filled them with rapture. As for Laurence, he was like one who reads a book of spiritualism and finds here a phrase and there an idea which he comprehends, and presently lays down the volume and looks around and discovers that he is, after all, in a world of sense and of touch. Nothing that the prophetess uttered touched him: it was unlike

anything he had ever heard: he was bewildered. But the mesmeric feeling left him when the singing ceased. The gift of Prophecy! what had she prophesied? It is not, we know, the gift of foretelling, but of out-speaking. What had she outspoken? He could seize on nothing.

The Prophetess! This remarkable person—could she really be a daughter of Vicesimus and a sister of Lucius, Cornelia, and the unfortunate Julia? Could she really belong to that respectable family? She was utterly thrown away in this obscure corner of the city. She should have taken a West End Chapel and started a new Church for the rich instead of for the poor. There are always so many rich people in search of a new Gospel that the revival of the early Church could not fail of success. A new Gospel for the Rich has not, in fact, been attempted since the Foundation, now fifty years ago, of the Catholic and Apostolic Church of St. Irving. In the Borough her gifts were thrown away.

Who careth for the religion of Bank Side? Who concerneth himself with the tendencies of Southwark? A remarkable woman. If a charlatan, then one of the finest water. If an enthusiast, then filled with enthusiasm of a most uncommon kind. A truly remarkable woman.

She stopped as suddenly as she began, sitting down and drawing the veil again over her face. The people began to sing another hymn—of praise and gladness.

When the hymn was finished the Prophetess arose again, but quietly, and threw back her veil.

‘A portion for Brother de Heyn,’ she said, softly. ‘Hast thou said in thy heart, it is vain to serve the Lord?’

The congregation regarded Brother de Heyn with admiration and envy. He had received a special message.

The Chevalier himself, however, bowed his head stricken with remorse. There had been grumblings with his lot. Rebellious

thoughts had truly troubled his soul in his thankless drudgery of the week.

‘A portion for Sister Flavia. Be angry for thy sister’s sake, but sin not. Leave transgressors to the Arm of the Lord.’

The tears came into Flavia’s eyes.

Then the Prophetess looked straight before her. But Laurence started and changed colour at her next words :—

‘A portion for the child of Lucy.’ What did she mean? ‘Thou art come from the Isles of the East where is the land of Ophir. Peace be upon thee and a blessing. Amen—Amen.’

The congregation stared. Who was the child of Lucy? Was this a dark saying like unto those riddles which in Bunyan’s story cheered the heart of Mansoul?

Then they sang another hymn, a hymn of dismissal, while the saucer went round and the pennies rattled. He who carried the saucer counted out the money when he had finished, and entered the amount in a little

book. Then he gave it all to Felix, who slipped it into his pocket with a blush of shame. Laurence now understood why he came to the chapel—his mother it was who ran this little chapel and paid the rent and the gas, and he himself was Paymaster, Clerk or Assistant Treasurer, though not as yet numbered with the Faithful.

‘And how on earth,’ Laurence asked himself, ‘did the Prophetess know me? Child of Lucy.—of course she could mean none but me.’

CHAPTER IX

‘LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE’

WHEN one is quite young, many opinions are strongly impressed upon the mind which have afterwards to be modified or abandoned. For instance, we used to be taught by certain allegorical pictures that at some definite moment—say when one had arrived at the great age of eighteen—a choice would be offered us—a choice for life—an alternative. It would be quite clear and plain: there would be no mistake at all about it: on the one hand a broad and flowery road presented to our consideration, down which thoughtless young people would be running hand in hand, laughing, singing, drinking champagne, and having the finest time possible, so that every-

one would envy their happiness. On the other hand a narrow and rocky path beset with thorns. But we knew very well which we should choose: for, look you! the benevolent angel who offered this choice would also show us the end of the flowery road which these cheerful young people could not see—otherwise they might have gone on dancing and singing where they were, but they would certainly have gone no further. For it ended in a flaming portal and on either side there was a dancing devil with a pitchfork, enjoying the pleasures of anticipation, grinning to think how these light-hearted young people would very soon begin to laugh on the other side of their mouths—the inside, I suppose. Also, over the rocky path the angel would show that there were hovering other most lovely angels. We never had the least doubt which we should choose. In those days we also considered that the older one grew, the wiser we should be, the more virtuous, the stronger and clearer in vision,

the better able to see the Kingdom of Heaven itself, and the open gates of the New Jerusalem. Now alas! these beliefs have undergone profound changes. As regards the young man's choice, for instance, we have learned that it is offered him every day all through his life, though doubtless there are some days when the choice is of greater importance.

A chance or choice was one day presented to Oliver Luttrell. Unfortunately it was not granted unto him to behold the dancing devils at the end of the road. Indeed, in making his choice, he really did not understand that he should meet this disagreeable pair at the close of his journey: he thought that this road, like the other, would lead him to a certain arm-chair much in the thoughts of ambitious youth—the Presidential Chair of the Royal Society. Everything now leads to a Chair. Fame, while she blows her trumpet, bears aloft a Chair instead of a Crown. It has got arms and a high back. Sometimes it

is a Presidential Chair—that of the Royal Academy, Royal Society, Geographical or other learned Corporation: sometimes it is a Bishop's Throne: sometimes it has a woolsack upon it: sometimes it is a Judge's Chair of State. Sometimes it is nothing but a plain Windsor Chair—one remembers the sight of an empty arm-chair which once brought tears to the eyes of all who speak the English tongue. Never a laurel wreath any more. There is one advantage in the exchange: the laurel crown was sometimes spiky and too often a misfit. I say, then, that Oliver, when he made his choice, thought that he was in no way hindering or interfering with the career he had set before himself. As if the Chair of Honour was ever to be reached along the road where those foolish virgins dance!

The serpent tempted him. The serpent came in the shape of his brother, the man upon town, bookmaker, gamester, rook. This gay and gallant brother, handsome, well

groomed and dressed, with his pockets full of money, dragged him out of the quiet routine of his laborious days and took him into the Kingdom of Misrule. Most young men at six-and-twenty have seen enough of this realm to know that it is not for them. In the case of Oliver, a youth spent in hard work and the nurture of ambitions : three or four years in the Laboratory of a quiet German University : little society with other young Englishmen : left him inexperienced in the ways of Queen Luxuria. He was not a cynic, because to be a cynic one must affect experience if one hath it not. If he knew not the seamy side of that world, he knew not its attractions.

Suddenly he was plunged into the very inner ring of this world, where everybody seemed brimful of happiness, everybody seemed rich, nobody had apparently anything to do but to sing and dance and feast and laugh.

Consider. This was a great change from the quiet life of the Laboratory. And in every man there is a sleeping devil.

Consider again. His own people—his brother and sister—astonished and dazzled him. Julia—the divine—Giulia—formerly Sal—who could approach her for beauty and for careless prodigal generosity? And his brother—formerly Pharaoh—once in rags—Oliver remembered of the former life nothing but the rags—there was no one, even among his own friends—to Oliver they appeared to be friends—who could compare with him for looks or for cleverness. He was a man of many accomplishments: he could play the fiddle or the banjo or the piano: he could sing—all in a swashbuckler, cavalry-camp sort of way: he could ride: he could tell stories: he could make up and act: he could also—but this Oliver learned afterwards—play every game of cards and perform all known tricks with these valuable and amusing toys. The knowledge was extremely useful to him though he kept it a secret. This handsome roystering gallant was Oliver's brother—wonderful to relate—his brother!

And he had always expected to meet his brother—if ever he should, by misfortune, chance upon him—in rags.

How had they arrived—this pair—at this present greatness? In the world of the Show, Circus, and playing folk, such instances of rapid rise are not unknown. The clog dance on a carpet at a racecourse: the song and hornpipe in a public-house: the daily practice of arts and accomplishments which delight the world and pull in the money: an engagement with a wandering circus: then one with a music hall: the discovery of unknown talent: the development of personal graces: careful teaching, quick learning—put all these together and you may understand how the pair of ragged Romany children managed to push ahead and presently put on splendid raiment, and assumed some of the manners of the swell.

This brother began to come often to the Laboratory. At first he looked about the place with curiosity. Then—finding that no money was to be made by electric apparatus

—with contempt. Strange that one of his people should take up with a pursuit by which no money could be got! Why else should a gipsy ever learn anything.

‘Sonny,’ he said one day, after trying to understand what the scientific profession really meant—‘why don’t you chuck it up?’

‘Chuck it up? Why—what else could I do?’

‘Something useful. Something that would bring in the chips.’

‘I shall get a better salary some time, I suppose.’

‘A hundred and fifty pounds a year! Three pound a week!’ Mr. Stanley made this calculation with infinite contempt. ‘To think of a likely chap like you content with a hundred and fifty! To be sure you can’t do anything: but I’d teach you. Can’t you get something out of the old man?’

‘No—he has nothing. He gave me all he had left in order that I might stay on in Germany.’

‘Three pound a week ! Well, you’ve seen how we live—and you seem to like it.’

‘It is a kind of life,’ said Oliver calmly, ‘that I had never seen before. Of course I like it. But a man who has got work to do can’t sit up all night.’

His brother laughed. ‘Suppose that is his work,’ he said. ‘Well, three pound a week, my son, won’t run to it. Most of the young fellows you saw the other night chuck away that much and more every night of their lives. They have their fling—and a good fling too—and it’s well worth all the money. But, you see, my chap’—he became here very didactic—‘wherever the money is flung around—whether at a Fair, or a Horse Race, or the Stephanotis Club—gentlemen like me are always standing about to pick it up. Ye—es : that is my walk in life. I pick it up. Oh, there’s a hundred ways—all on the square—to look at. The best of all ways is a little game, just for two—piquet or écarté for choice—with me on one side of the table and

a nice young gentleman with his pockets full on the other, and the champagne ready and within reach on the sideboard. No big jobs and I O U's for me : let me collar the ready cash, whether it's five pounds or fifty, and be ready to give revenge for another evening. Then, my son, nothing nasty can be said. And no partners. Some of my pals work in couples. They go backwards and forwards to America : they catch the Colonial Juggins and they work the railways. Everyone has got his own way, and that is mine. Well, you see, Oliver, since that's your new name, the night's my working time, and if I went to bed at ten, it would be in bed at the workhouse.'

Some men would feel ashamed should a brother openly avow that he consorted with young fellows having their fling solely in order to win their money. Oliver did not. Perhaps this laxity was due to hereditary lawlessness in his blood : perhaps to that remarkable education which left him free to create his own morality and to select his own

religion: perhaps he knew already that his brother must be making the money which he so freely scattered in some such way as this.

‘Well, sonny,’ the brother continued. ‘In a year or two the young swells are cleaned out. But there’s always a new lot coming along. My pals and me—we stay until the place gets too hot for us. You can come among us if you like. But you’ve got no money to lose; and so, my dear boy, if you come, you must learn how to pick it up.’

Oliver made no reply. His brother, he perceived, would not understand that it was the mirth and the music, the singing, the laughter, the carelessness that attracted him. It seems a poor kind of temptation for a young man of study and science; yet, if you drop your hook into the sea with such a bait, you are pretty sure to catch your young man, whatever be his profession.

‘Oliver,’ Pharaoh went on, changing the subject, ‘that was a queer story you told me

the other night about all that money—you know.'

'Yes. It is a queer story,' Oliver replied, with a little effort.

'And the girl who ought to have it all——'

'No—it is her father who ought to have it. The girl's got nothing to do with it.'

'How long is it since you found out?'

'Only a fortnight or so. I found an old letter in a desk and I read it and put things together.'

'Ye—es, and you've been thinking about it ever since.'

'Naturally.'

'As you say. The heir is the dead man's nephew, and you say that he won't claim it.'

'He won't claim it. He only heard the other day that his uncle was dead—heard it accidentally : he never hears anything and he knows nothing. When I told him there was no Will and that it was all his—all his—all

that great property his—well: he said he would never claim it. Says there is a curse upon it. A curse! If I had it I would soon show what I thought of the curse.'

'What would you do with all that money if you had it?' asked his brother softly.

'I would build a Laboratory for myself. I would—but you don't understand——'

'No fun? No little suppers?'

Oliver laughed. 'Yes,' he said, 'I would take my share of amusement too. But my work should come first.'

'He won't claim it! Lord! I never knew people could be built that way. And he's got a daughter. Now: if he were to get that money and then become a Percher, it would all go to that girl?'

'I suppose so.'

'Then it's hers by rights, isn't it?'

'I suppose so.'

'Yes. I've been thinking over that story more than a bit, and over the way you thought of. There's something in it.'

‘What way?’

‘Don’t be a fool, Oliver, because, though you may have been a bit on, you were not so far gone as to forget.’

‘What I said the other night,’ Oliver replied quickly, ‘was a mere fancy. It meant nothing.’

‘A mere fancy, was it, though? Well, my boy, it was a very artful fancy.’

‘I said, if such and such a thing were to happen.’

‘How the devil is it to happen if someone don’t make it happen?’

Oliver was silent.

‘Now, look here, sonny. The money ought to be kept in the family, where it belongs, oughtn’t it? That’s justice. If the Queen rakes it in—that’s injustice. Is one man’s stubborn folly to keep that money out of the family? Certainly not, if we can prevent it. How can we prevent it? Very easily, says you. Only—one good turn deserves another. If the girl gets the money,

she must take you with it. That's fair, isn't it?'

Oliver said nothing.

'I've said this to myself over and over again.'

'You don't understand the thing at all,' Oliver burst out. 'I'm sorry I ever mentioned it to you. Do you think the girl is the sort—the sort that you know—to whom one could even hint at such a bargain?'

'One woman, I take it, is like another. And I never met the woman yet who was above thinking of money. Or the man either,' he added with impartiality.

Oliver said nothing.

'Well then, supposing that little idea of yours could be carried out——'

'I will not touch it. I will have nothing to do with it.'

——'by somebody else. I suppose if you were married to the girl you could prevent her from imitating her fool of a

father. Suppose you begin by getting engaged to her——'

'I have thought of it,' Oliver replied gently. 'In fact, I have made a beginning.'

'Without an engagement or a marriage, it would be no use thinking of it.'

'It is no use, I tell you. I can't think of it.'

'Well then, someone else must. Look here, Oliver, this is too good a thing to be let go. I'm going to make you rich. Can you, to begin with, get engaged to this girl?'

Oliver considered for a few minutes. While he sat considering, his face changed. It became once more, as it had been in the old days when he was a half-starved child, a face as of a skull with a tight skin over it, crowned with a thick black mat of hair.

'Yes,' he said sullenly, 'she shall be engaged to me, whether she likes it or not.'

'When she is, let me know.' Mr. Stanley rose as if to go. 'Time enough then.'

‘What do you mean to do?’ Oliver asked with alarm.

‘My boy, you shan’t be put to the least trouble, or danger, or difficulty in this matter. I know a poor devil—a lawyer he was once, but he came to grief over the money—couldn’t count it, I suppose—who’ll do the whole job. He’s paralysed now: lives by writing whatever he’s told to write. You want a certain document. Give him the names and the signatures, the dates and all about it, and that document, whatever it is, will be ready to time.’

‘He knows your name, I suppose?’

‘If you suppose that, you suppose I am a fool. No, my son; he does not know my name. And if he did, nobody knows that I’m your brother. And as for you, he’s never seen you, nor heard of you, and you won’t come into the business at all till the end.’

‘And when we’ve got the document, what then?’

‘We’ll think of that afterwards. Can you get the signatures?’

Oliver opened a drawer and drew out a paper.

‘Here is an old deed. I picked it up in Joe Mayes’s office the other day. It contains the signature of Samuel Norbery. The other signatures are his witnesses—Joseph Mayes and an old clerk who is dead.’

‘Oh! Who is Joseph Mayes?’

‘He was Mr. Norbery’s clerk, and now calls himself his successor. He’s got some of the papers of the old business.’

‘Oh! He’s got the papers. I suppose he might have been one of the witnesses if a will had been made.’

‘Very likely. Most likely.’

‘Do you know him?’

‘Yes—very well. I have always known him.’

‘Humph! If such a will were found among the papers, what would he be likely to do, now?’

‘He would certainly try to make terms with the parties concerned before he showed the document.’

‘Good man! Well now—supposing—listen to me—supposing his name—the name of Joseph Mayes should happen to be on the paper as one of the witnesses, and suppose he was himself to find the thing among the papers—eh?—without expecting or suspecting—eh?—what then?’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Think a bit. First, he finds—suppose—a will. This startles him more than a bit. Then he finds his own name as a witness. This is another startler. He knows, very well, that he never signed that name. Therefore, not being quite a fool, he perceives that the thing is a plant. Very good. He puts it aside—mind, he don’t destroy it—and he thinks it over. The more he thinks it over, the more he begins to remember when and where he signed that will. And mind—he’s got to produce it—nobody else—and, if ne-

cessary, he's got to swear to it. Nobody else has got anything to do with it. If there's a row they go for him, not for you and me. Do you catch on? It's this way. If he produces the will—he will get from somebody concerned, after the money is secured—a big lump. If he don't he will get nothing. He knows he didn't write the will—he may suspect what he pleases. Let him suspect. And it's all to his advantage that there shall never be any proof. Now, young man, do you begin to tumble?'

Oliver sat down and gasped. The audacity of the proposal filled him with amazement. If the thing could be really done, without any assistance at all from himself! and if the thing, should it fail, be made to appear the work of another man!

'I will take this paper,' said Pharaoh, putting it into his pocket. 'Now give me the full names. Oh! they are in the deed. But—I say—what about the second witness?'

‘Take the man in that paper. It was old Backler’s clerk—and he’s dead.’

‘Well—and the date?’

‘Make it seven or eight years ago—any day.’

‘Good. But suppose we were to fix a day when he could be proved to have been out of town?’

‘Old Norbery never went out of town.’

‘Better and better.’

‘I have learned,’ said Oliver, trying not to look guilty, ‘that a will is nearly always kept by the solicitor who draws it. Generally he keeps the letter of instruction if there is any, and the first draft as well. Let us have all those. Here is a letter of Mr. Norbery’s, to show the handwriting—and here is a paper drawn in the handwriting of Mr. Backler his lawyer. You see, it is written on large thin blue paper.’

‘Oliver,’ said his brother with eyes of admiration, ‘you’ve got a head. You will be a credit to your family yet, though you were bought for a fi-pun note.’

He took these papers too, and placed them in his pocket.

‘There’s one thing more,’ said Oliver. ‘The old man had robbed his brother-in-law and therefore he hated his nephew. Better let that be expressed in the will.’

‘How about a condition—the money to go to the girl when she marries Oliver Luttrell—eh?’

‘No—no—not that. Say—when she changes her name—on the day of her marriage—when she ceases to be Althea Indagine.’

‘Yes. I see. That is better.’ Mr. Stanley made a note to this effect. ‘That shows a good strong healthy family animosity. When she ceases to be an Indagine. We’ll add a little clause about you, I think. Sammy,’ he added with great feeling: ‘I really feel proud of you. You call this just a mere fancy, do you?—with everything cut and dried ready to hand. Just a mere fancy, was it? Well, you shall give that dear girl her

money : you shall pay the man—what's his name?—Mayes—a thousand pounds—five thousand pounds. How much is it? Half a million? We'll make the milestones fly. Not a word more till you are engaged. Come to Julia's to-morrow evening. There will be one or two people and a little Nap, or something lively, afterwards. I'll lend you some money. Until this comes off—I'll keep you rolling in money. But, sonny, for Lord's sake don't play with the sportsmen of the Stephanotis Club.'

CHAPTER X

THE 'SATURDAY REVIEW'

THEY were talking of the Poet.

'Above everything,' said his daughter, 'I wish that he could go back to the world of letters and rejoin his old companions.'

'After all these years most of them must be dead and gone,' Laurence replied. 'I have been into Fleet Street and searched the old haunts. No poets I am told meet now at the Rainbow, except accidentally.'

'You have given him new life, Mr. Waller. If only you could take him back again to the old ways. I dream of his taking up again, even after all these years, the active life which he gave up thirty years ago.'

Laurence reflected.

'As for the world of letters,' he said, 'I

know nobody in it. Your father is the only poet I have ever seen. But I might make him willing to find his own way back. May I try—if only for the sake of pleasing you ? ’

His voice dropped a little : a girl with the least grain of coquetry would have observed a softening of his eyes. But Althea thought not of those things. She was thinking of her father. Better would it have been had she shown some little—any little—sense of what might be in the young man’s heart. Better had he forced her, then and there, to understand. But he was in the Paradise where in a purple mist everything that one desires seems about to happen of its own accord. In such a Paradise one never desires to hurry things. Why shake the tree when the fruit is about to fall ? Happy land ! Happy those who live in it, though they presently, it must be confessed, get fat and lazy.

He set himself to the task, however—and he succeeded. It was by an artful deception that the moralist cannot but deplore. You

shall hear what it was. Now an artful deception of the more elaborate kind takes a little time to arrange. Duplicity is troublesome. Treachery requires stage management.

When his scheme was perfected he repaired to the house in New Thames Street, a paper carelessly rolled up in his hand—it was in the morning—and he boldly knocked at the door of the poet's study. Nothing less than the poet's study, if you please. He knew not, altogether, his own temerity. Yet no one, not even Althea, had ever before ventured to disturb the sacred seclusion of this spot in the morning. Why, it is in the morning that the Darling of the Muses gets his finest ideas. The children of Vicesimus did not more religiously respect the sanctity of the Academy. Yet this young man boldly, fearlessly, knocked at the door with less hesitation than if it had been a lawyer's office.

The room into which he entered was lined with books all round the walls from floor to ceiling : there was not a single new book on

the shelves, not one whose freshness of binding proclaimed it to be less than thirty years old. The Poet was discovered standing at his shelves taking down one book after another in the idle manner of one who loves books so well as to love handling them. He was, in fact, 'looking up a point.' Many idle men are perpetually employed in looking up a point. With his fine, delicate features, his long white hair, his tall figure, he looked every inch a poet. He was clad in a dressing-gown made of some shawl-like stuff frayed at the wrists and ragged at the skirts. Thirty or forty years ago all poets, authors, actors, musicians, dramatists and painters, Bohemians and bachelors, wore such a dressing-gown in the morning—as well be out of life as out of fashion. The dressing-gown was in fact as much a part of the literary profession in those days as the stout-and-oyster supper after the play and the half a dozen goes of brandy or whisky punch after the oysters. The garment was tied about his waist by a thick crimson

rope with tassels, once very splendid though now faded ; and what with the books, the dressing-gown, the crimson rope, the white beard, and the flowing locks, the Poet looked and felt extremely professional and business-like.

He looked up and smiled a welcome—actually he welcomed a visitor who dared to disturb his mornings. He who had received no visitors for so many years !

‘ You, my young friend ? Come in—come in. You wished perhaps to see my den—the poet’s workshop. Ha ! ha ! A poor place—a poor place—but look around you ! ’ He himself looked round with a little anxiety as to the properties. It is not on the stage alone that we are anxious about the properties. He was reassured. The table was strewn with papers, and these—as they should be—were covered with verses ; an open drawer showed a pile of MSS. ; a pen lay upon the papers ; three or four note-books lay open ; the chair looked as if it had been just pushed back ; by

the empty fireplace was a long, low leather chair, on the seat of which lay an open book ; on a smaller table at the window was a row of books, some open, some waiting, all tossed in an admirable confusion ; on the mantelshelf hung pencil sketches, framed, of literary men, famous the generation ago, the memory of whom is now somewhat faded. Mr. Indagine felt on the whole satisfied with the look of his study : it had a certain learned disorder as of the Scholar and the Poet ; it showed a wealth of books ; it looked like work. One thing alone was wanting. There were no proofs. This defect went to his heart like a knife. It seemed to spoil all. There should have been a pile of proofs—printer's proofs. But—he took courage again—would this omission be perceived by the young gentleman from far Australia ?

‘ You may retire from society, Mr. Indagine,’ said his admirer, ‘ but you cannot, I observe, retire from work.’

‘ One must work or die. Not to work

would be high treason to the Muse. The gift of expression is conferred, I take it, Sir, on the express condition of work.'

'You must have done a great deal since you came here.'

The Poet sat down in his arm-chair, crossing his legs and resting his fingers one upon the other. It is an admirable attitude for one who speaks words of weight.

'I have worked—sometimes successfully—sometimes, as is the case with all who work on Art of any kind, with less success. The results of thirty years are in this room.'

'Then we may expect another volume—many other volumes?'

'Young gentleman, I said work : I did not say, publication.'

'Surely—with submission—one includes the other.'

'My dear young friend,' Mr. Indagine rose solemnly, 'I will confide to you that I have had, not ambitions—at my age ambitions are dead—but a Design, a Purpose. I have pro-

posed to myself a posthumous pleasure: I have resolved upon leaving behind me, at my death, my works ready for publication.'

'Oh! at your death! Nay, Mr. Indagine——'

'Would you have me give them—my enemies—another opportunity for showing their malice and malignity? No, Sir, no.'

'But—thirty years—your enemies are dead by this time. Or they are now powerless. What were you saying the other night? We were talking of popularity and we argued back from Australia to the Mother Country. Think; you took the line that if a man was popular in the colonies he must first have been popular at home, you remember? The inference, Mr. Indagine, though you made no personal application, was obvious, permit me to say, to every one present.'

The Poet sat down again and murmured softly, as these grateful words of flattery dropped upon his ear. The young man looked so earnest, so deferent, and with eyes of such

admiration, that he could not choose but to murmur and purr.

‘Only one inference is possible,’ Laurence repeated.

The Poet laid his head upon his hand. ‘You wish me——’ he began.

‘I wish you to come out of this retreat, where you have shut yourself up too long, and to return to the world with the harvest—the sheaves, the golden grain—of your long seclusion.’

‘To return? No, no—it is too late.’

‘As for your old friends,’ Laurence continued, ‘they are gone. Most of them are dead, and the world has, I assure you, long since forgotten the savage attack made upon your name and fame.’

‘How? If my verses have become popular, how can the world have forgotten the history of the poet?’

‘There are some poets, perhaps, into whose private life the world seldom inquires. It learns that they lead a retired life. No one,

for example, has ever written a life of Tennyson or of Longfellow.'

'It would be, I confess, a triumph to appear in the world once more.'

'Surely. Though the old circles of which you have told me are long since broken up. By the way,' Laurence blushed and hesitated, 'there is a curious illustration of that inference—I said it was an obvious inference—which I have just seen in a paper.' He unfolded and straightened the paper in his hand. 'It is the "Saturday Review."' He laid it on the table and turned over the pages. 'You know the "Saturday Review?"'

'I remember it. Yes, yes—it was started by some men in our set. There was a clever man named—I forget his name—who became Editor. The "Saturday Review"—does it exist still? It began cleverly.'

'Why, here it is! I should rather think it did exist! There is an article about you in it.'

'An article? An article about me?' The Poet started to his feet. 'About me?'

‘There may have been a thousand about you while you have been hiding away. However, here is one.’

‘Give it to me—give it to me.’

The article was one of those in small type which are found in the middle of the Journal. It was on the single sheet of four pages which is sometimes found in the very middle of the paper.

‘It is called,’ said Laurence, as Mr. Indagine eagerly turned over the pages, ‘The Poet of a Single Volume.’

Mr. Indagine read it aloud. As he read, his voice faltered, his cheek flushed, and his eyes glowed.

The writer of the article began by asking who was Clement Indagine, and what had become of him. He likened him unto a certain Waring commemorated by another poet. He asked why, after one effort, one single volume of verse, which contained promise if not actual finished work, of a higher order than had ever been given to the world since the

appearance of Keats's Poems, the writer had suddenly disappeared. This opening sentence it was which made the voice of the reader to shake.

The article occupied a column and a half in length, and proceeded to quote from the poems and to comment upon them, but as in the capacity of humble admirer rather than hard and cold critic. The readers of the 'Saturday Review' must have marvelled greatly at the attitude of this writer, because, to one who read the extracted gems, they did not seem so very wonderful after all. They might even be called commonplace. Now, it is not the wont of this Journal to bestow unstinted praise upon mediocre poets and commonplace writers. Perhaps, however, there were finer passages lying unquoted in the volume. The praise might have seemed to the habitual reader overdone, even on the supposition of the hidden gems, and one who read the paper regularly would perhaps have observed a *je-né-sais-quoi* in the style not altogether in

harmony with the rest of the paper. But Mr. Indagine had not seen the 'Saturday Review' for thirty years, and the article was praise of his own work. Therefore he saw nothing strange, forced, or dissonant.

In conclusion the writer said :—

'We have quoted enough from the remarkable volume before us to prove that this unknown author was as a Poet a whole head and shoulders above any of his time, except Tennyson and Browning. In the sweetness and flow of his metres he anticipates Swinburne: in quiet pathos he surpasses Longfellow: in simple unstudied grace he is equal to Austin Dobson: in the dexterity and ease of his verse he resembles Edmund Gosse. The widespread favour with which he is now regarded: the natural manner in which his lines spring to the memory of writer and speaker, and are daily quoted, and have become household words: show that the world at large is, like ourselves, anxious to know what, who, and whence is this Clement Inda-

gine. If it was an adopted name, what was his real name? If he be one of those to whom the Gods have shown their love in the manner customary to the Olympians, where did he live and when did he die? If he is still living, why has he written no more? Why was he received at first with indifference, or contempt, or worse? By what strange fate has this writer been passed over and neglected by his own generation only to spring into new and vigorous life in that which follows? This is a unique literary phenomenon: and it should be taken to heart by the most unsuccessful. Nay: we believe that the story of Clement Indagine and his posthumous fame—if indeed it be posthumous—will hereafter become as much a commonplace of consolation for the failures in Poetry as the history of the rejection of “Vanity Fair” has been to the novelist who hawks his bolster of MSS. from publisher to publisher. But let someone—someone—tell us—who—who was Clement Indagine?’

The Poet read the last lines in an agitated

voice. The tears stood in his eyes : his lips trembled : his cheek was flushed. Then he folded the paper and tried to appear calm and critical.

‘This,’ he said, ‘is—ahem!—unexpected—I confess, and gratifying—most gratifying. I admit, young gentleman, that it is most gratifying. After so many years to find oneself the subject of such criticism—so appreciative and so generous—is indeed a phenomenon in the History of Letters. It is very gratifying. The language of the writer, I think, is calm, critical—even cold in parts.’ Oh, Poet ! ‘But it is sympathetic throughout. Perhaps a more typical selection of pieces might have been made for quotation, but the writer speaks from a full heart ; his mind is fully charged with the verses—he is saturated with his author. That is as it should be. Young gentleman, you are singularly fortunate. You are a stranger from far Australia—from the Antipodes—yet you—and none but you—bring me the news that

I am read and loved out there—out there—and therefore, by inference—yes, yes, by inference—at home. And then you—none but you—bring me convincing proof—clear and tangible proof—that I am a name and a power among my own people.'

His voice broke. He sat down and was silent for a space. His eyes were humid.

Laurence, who had smiled while he spoke of the coldness of the writer, now watched him with anxious look. Had he gone too far?

'My ambition,' said the Poet, 'has been achieved. After long years it has been achieved. Now let me depart in peace, since life has no more to give me. I say, young gentleman,' he rose with unsteady legs, 'let me—let me——'

Laurence caught him in his arms as he fell forward, fainting. The crown of laurel—late plucked, late wreathed—was too much for him.

Ten minutes later he had recovered and

was sitting up, the "Saturday Review" still in his hands.

'But for you, Mr. Waller,' he said, 'but for you I should never have seen this. I cannot, indeed, thank you too much. No, I cannot, I cannot. The sight of this article has brought me such a moment of happiness as I never expected to feel. Will you leave me now? I must think—I must think. No, without you I should never have heard of my own fame. Althea sees no papers. My brother-in-law reads nothing—Oliver tells us nothing. The Cottle girls, poor children! hardly know the meaning of literature. Leave me now.'

'One moment, Mr. Indagine.' Laurence took the paper out of the poet's hands, and opening a penknife, he cut out the article. 'You don't want the whole paper, do you? I will take that away. Remember, Sir, we must have more work from you.'

'Ha! ha!' the Master laughed: the Master threw back his head and laughed:

‘more work! Yes. You shall have it. More work! It lies ready for you in the drawer.’

‘And you must return to society. Promise me that you will come out of your seclusion and return to the world.’

‘Yes, yes—return. That is, I will—I will think of it.’ He did not laugh at the thought of returning to the world. Laurence remembered the words of his daughter: ‘The world has become dreadful to him.’

‘You will come back to a sympathetic world. Your old world of wits is broken up. You will appear in a different world altogether. I am truly fortunate in having been the means of bringing these things to your knowledge.’

‘Young gentleman,’ the Poet seized his hand, ‘I am grateful to you. If you knew—if you could ever guess the half—of what I have suffered from the neglect—the unmerited neglect—of the world—you would realise something of what I feel. Yes—yes—there must be a change. But go—go now—and let

me see you later on. I must be alone—to think—to feel—to understand what has befallen me.'

All this happened in the morning.

In the evening Laurence, who had been dining in the West, returned about ten.

He looked in, as was his wont. There were signs of excitement and agitation.

'Oh! Mr. Waller,' cried Cassie, 'only to think! Mr. Indagine is a great man at last! We are so proud. Althea has brought us the article—such a beautiful article! We read it all through. We sent Sempronius to buy a copy of the paper—here it is—but we can't find the article in it.'

'No? Then it must have been in another number. Of course. Perhaps in next week's. Never mind. It is a grand thing for Mr. Indagine, is it not?—to find that he has become so famous.'

'Felix says that none of the fellows at the Poly ever heard of Mr. Indagine's poetry,' said Sempronius from his retreat.

‘At the Poly!’ Cassie repeated scornfully. ‘What do they think of at the Poly but gymnastics and lectures and things? You don’t go to the Poly for poetry. I have never seen Althea look so happy, Mr. Waller. You have made her as happy as her father.’

‘The Bank is honoured,’ said Mr. Cottle, ‘by this public recognition. Shakespeare, Marlow, Massinger, Fletcher, Vicesimus Cottle, Clement Indagine! A goodly succession indeed! My father would have been gratified by this public recognition.’

CHAPTER XI

THE DOCTOR'S HAPPINESS

I do not suppose that anybody ever woke up on a fine summer morning with a greater sense of satisfaction, a warmer approval of conscience, or a more balmy confidence that things were going to happen exactly as they were wanted than Laurence after this cold-blooded deception of the aged bard. He would have danced and performed capers and pirouettes had he known how : he would have sung songs of joy and gladness had he known any, but no such songs are manufactured in these days : he would willingly have dressed himself in purple silk and gone upon Bank Side with a crown of roses on his head and a gold cup, or a lute, or some such trifle in his hand in order to show his gladness after the

manner of the ancients. But young men now do never display these outward signs of joy. Alas! His joy was to be turned into sorrow and his laughter into mourning.

The reason of the joy was nothing more than his success by means of craft and subtlety. Reason and argument would have failed with the divine poet. Flattery succeeded. This, indeed, is the only form of deception which never fails. When the fox in the fable—the only fable which is always true at all ages and at all times—got that cheese from the crow and was taking it home with a smile of satisfaction, he was met by a monkey who assured him, with many bows and smiles, that of all the creatures of the field, none was so truly virtuous, so disinterested, as the Herr Reineke. He was wool all through, said the monkey. He was the only perfectly white creature. He was straight. Benevolence and integrity shone in his eyes. He then entreated the fox, whom he addressed indifferently as Your Grace, or Your Lordship, or Right Reverend

Sir, to give him, the worst of sinners, some short discourse upon religion. He himself would hold the cheese during the sermon. A moment later, he administered the moral from a lofty branch.

Apprenez que tout flatteur
Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute.

The rest of the story and how the monkey fell a victim to the wolf and the wolf to the pig, who ate up the cheese while the weasel was making up a story, may be read in Phædrus.

Flattery had succeeded. Althea, ignorant of the means, was pleased. Why, the poet swallowed it all, even the grossest bits, with greediness, and when it was finished, only longed for more. Now, he would come out of his retirement—for which he was already prepared by the delusion of wide-spread fame—and go back to the world, whatever that might mean. If he would only do that, only take Althea away with him, what mattered any amount of delusion? Let him even tempt once more the malignity of his enemies.

During his thirty years of sulks—what a splendid spell of that enjoyable mood!—he must have made many thousand lovely lines. But Althea would also go into the world when her father returned to it.

Althea was pleased. Some day he might have to confess to her the deception he had practised. If—when—no—if—a certain termination of his visit should really happen, he would have to make a clean breast. But not to the poet. He who had deceived himself at the outset might harmlessly continue in an illusion so pleasing and so healthful to the soul. Never was man made more happy by a device so simple. This young man felt no real remorse for his deception, but he was certainly uneasy as to the way in which Althea might take it.

How Althea would take it. He stood at his window and looked across the river. Bank Side was very noisy and busy: hundreds of men ran up and down the planks with baskets on their backs: there must have been an

immense order from someone for broken glass: scrap iron was certainly in great demand somewhere. But this young man saw and heard nothing. Like Althea, he was fallen into a dream: he saw, somewhere in a bower of bliss, a young man and a maiden: the young man wooed the maiden and she gave him her lips to kiss.

Presently he awoke from this blissful vision and finished his dressing. Then he went down-stairs. No one was in the house except Sempronius, whose holidays had just begun. Some boys go to Broadstairs or Brighton or Walton-on-the-Naze for their holidays: Sempronius went into his corner beside the window. But he enjoyed his holidays quite as much as any other boy, because he read all day long—not books from his grandfather's library—but borrowed books—Scott—Fielding—Defoe—Smollett—Dickens—everybody. Cassie had gone to her photographer's studio; Flavia to St. Martin's; Lucius to his perch on the Higher Branch; Cornelia to her seat in the

porch beside the Body. Breakfast was laid for him—and Sempronius was in his place, nose in book.

‘Well, boy,’ said Laurence. ‘How are your sisters this morning?’

‘Cassie cried all night,’ said the boy, without taking his eyes off his book. ‘I heard her through the partition.’

‘Why did Cassie cry?’

‘Oh!’ The boy shook his head impatiently—what were Cassie’s woes to a boy in the middle of ‘King Solomon’s Mines’? ‘She cried because she’s quarrelled with Oliver.’

‘You think that?’

‘I know it’s that. Flavia knows it too.’

‘You have reason for believing?’

‘Oh bother,’ said the boy. ‘I’ve seen him kissing her a dozen times.’

‘This fact, my young friend,’ said Laurence, pouring out his tea, ‘taken singly, might seem to favour your hypothesis. The danger, however, of a general conclusion from one or two isolated facts’—but the boy shook

his shoulders and put his fingers to his ears.

The rude awakening took place after breakfast when Laurence retired to the Bank for his morning tobacco. There are always a few of the unemployed lounging about here in the morning exchanging ideas. The young swell who had nothing to do was popular among them because he readily conversed with them, made everybody free of his pouch and proved himself a ready lender of those small sums which it would be an excess of duty to remember or return.

The Doctor it was who rudely awakened him. He came marching briskly along Bank Side on his morning round, and seeing Laurence, stopped to greet him cheerily. The Doctor was always a cheerful man: all doctors in general practice are cheerful: in fact, cheerfulness is the first subject in which a medical student has to satisfy his examiners. Only a specialist is allowed to be sometimes grumpy.

‘Why,’ he said, ‘you are the very man I was thinking of at the moment.’

‘I am glad to have been in your thoughts.’

‘This very morning after breakfast I went to my brother-in-law’s study—a thing I haven’t done for years. “Clement,” I said, “I should like to carry the good news to that new friend of ours who has brought us so much happiness.”’

‘Good news?’ Laurence was thinking of the article and its effect. ‘I took in the paper myself, yesterday morning.’

‘You did. Nothing ever made him so happy. But it is even better news than that. In the evening—in the evening’—the Doctor’s voice broke a little. He sat down on the bench and cleared his throat. ‘Twenty years ago’—he started his information with a new paragraph, as people will when they are much moved—‘I began a most interesting experiment. You know something of it, already. I wanted, first of all, to isolate a boy from the more mischievous influences of the age. I

wanted him to grow up free from prejudices, so as to look at truth with clear and steady eyes. I proposed that he should learn, for himself, what we vainly try to teach—how to elevate his soul. I thought that a boy taught to search for truth in all her forms would the soonest arrive at the one doctrine which can ever advance the world—I mean the sacrifice of self.’

Laurence thought of the doctrine at which the seeker after Truth had really arrived—the exaltation and worship of self; could the Doctor then be quite ignorant of his pupil’s views?

‘Well—my son—I have always called him my son—grew up and has become what you know and have seen. Am I right to be proud of such a son?’

‘As a man of science,’ said Laurence, gravely.

‘To keep him long enough in Germany to finish his studies ran away with all the little money I had left—not that I grudge it.

Never was money better spent. But it is the fact. My brother-in-law, as you may suppose, is not rich. In fact his only property consists of three or four houses bequeathed him by a cousin, and we are not able to do more than live with strict economy. Do I weary you with these details?’

‘No, no, not in the least, I assure you,’ said Laurence, wondering what this might mean. ‘Pray go on.’

‘You have taken so kindly an interest in Clement: we all like you so much. Well, I will go on. We are getting old, he and I—and there is Althea. There is Althea.’

If the Doctor had not been gazing into the middle of a half-laden barge he might have seen the young man’s cheeks flush suddenly—and it might have caused even the least suspicious man in the world to have suspicions.

‘There is Althea,’ Laurence repeated, with an effort.

‘We think of her and of her future and we tremble. For, when we are gone what

will become of her? We have lived altogether apart from the world—foolishly, I now think—but at first I had my work and Clement had what he thought sufficient reasons: therefore, the girl has no friends: and she will have very little money. What is to become of her? She is ignorant of the world and innocent. She might fall a prey to any designing person. Good Heavens! What will become of her? The question has been before us lately a great deal, and I confess that it makes me very uneasy. After sixty anything may happen to a man. What is to become of Althea when we are gone?’

‘Doctor,’ cried Laurence, eagerly, ‘let me——’

‘One moment, my dear young friend—one moment. Last night, after Althea had gone to bed, Oliver, who was with us, opened his mind.’

‘Oliver? Oliver?’ If his cheek had been crimson before, it now became white. ‘Oliver opened his mind?’

‘Oliver told us that he has long loved Althea—and asked our permission to address her. That is my news. That is why I am so rejoiced. Oliver and Althea—my adopted son and my sister’s daughter. They have been brought up together. They know each other entirely. We can trust her happiness to Oliver with such confidence as we should feel in no one else. Her happiness must be considered first. As for other things, there is a great future before him: she will be proud of her husband. That is a great point.’

‘But there is—— Has Althea—has Miss Indagine—consented?’

‘Oliver will speak to her this evening. We agreed that nothing should be said to her by ourselves, and we would not endeavour to influence her. She will not know our own hopes: Oliver has promised not to put this view of the matter before her. It is left entirely to her heart.’

‘To her heart,’ Laurence repeated, his own a little lifted by the assurance.

‘As for Oliver, he will have a wife who is one of a million. That he knows very well. I have for some time hoped that the influence of love would be brought to bear upon his character. There is a point in the history of every man when love is needed for the full development of his character. He may pass through it without getting love, and without permanent loss, but for most men it is needed. I think that Oliver has reached this point. Love will reveal to him many aspects of humanity of which he is as yet ignorant.’

‘Yes,’ said Laurence shortly. ‘Has Oliver spoken to you about the—the progress he has made towards your doctrines?’

‘No: he is feeling his way. He is working, searching, and meditating. He leads the simple life which befits the true scientific spirit. I am content, so far.’

‘The business will be settled, you say, this evening.’

‘Yes. Come in at half-past nine. Come in and rejoice with us. You have brought

so much light and happiness to the house that we should like you to be present at our new rejoicing. I haven't bored you with all this gossip, have I? You look worried. I ought to have noticed that before.'

'No—no. You have interested me'—he tried to smile—'much more than you can guess. I am most interested. I will be with you this evening.'

The Doctor nodded and laughed and strode away to see his patients.

This was the rude awakening. This was how things were going to happen just as he desired. This was the end of the little story which he had resolved to watch. Now, indeed, he might pack up his things and go home.

But the story was not yet finished.

CHAPTER XII

ALTHEA'S ENGAGEMENT

ONE who goes a-wooing should dance as he walks, and should laugh when he speaks: he should have the light of love in his eyes, and the flush of yearning on his cheek. He should also show the certainty of conquest in his carriage, which should be valiant and confident, yet not arrogant. To come creeping, with downcast eyes, a cloudy brow, and an anxious pale face, is a poor way to open up a subject so delightful and so full of interest. Yet it was the way adopted by Oliver. He had asked Althea to meet him in her father's study at nine that evening. She certainly knew what he proposed to say: that false start made on Bank Side warned her. Some girls go to such an interview with

beating hearts and burning cheeks: Althea went quietly and gravely, with no outward sign of emotion whatever.

Outside, in the opposite room, the two old men sat at their chess table, pretending to play; but one exposed his Queen and the other forgot to take advantage of it. One left a mate easy to be snatched and the other saw it not. Yet, as usual, they sat, chin in hand, as if pondering the way of war.

Althea was the first to keep that appointment. She betook herself to the study at the stroke of nine. Here she waited, standing thoughtfully at the table, playing with a paper-knife. She was thinking how best to frame her answer. Now a girl who intends to accept a man does not generally—at least, one hopes not—cast about for a fitting formula of words.

Oliver appeared in ten minutes. As we have said, he presented little outward show of the passionate lover. Had he been ten years younger you would have said he was

sulky. He was nervous; he fidgeted with his hat as if not knowing where to bestow it, as happens to persons unaccustomed to the manners of the Great. Althea watched him curiously. That Oliver should even imagine to himself that he had fallen in love with her was a thing so contrary to all her experience of the young man, that she was fairly puzzled. If you live with a person and watch him every day, and have made such an estimate of his character as seems to suit with every one of his actions and quite satisfies you: and if that person goes and does something totally at variance with that estimate—something that will not fit into it at all—you are justified in feeling bewildered. However, she had come to hear what he had to say.

‘What do you want with me, Oliver?’ she asked, as he did not at first speak.

‘Lucky to find you alone at last,’ he replied, grumbling. What sort of wooer is that who would begin a declaration of love by a grumble?

‘I am always alone, I think.’

‘You are always with that Australian fellow. Well, he’s going back to his own country soon.’ He lifted his eyes sharply to watch the effect of this announcement, which had no foundation in fact. But the girl showed no sign of emotion.

‘Indeed?’ she said; ‘he has not told me that he was going. I am sorry. We shall all be sorry. But that is not what you came to say, Oliver.’

‘You remember’—the lady at this stage generally turns her head and drops her eyes, but in this case the situation was reversed. The lover turned his head and dropped his eyes, while the lady continued unmoved. ‘You remember, Althea,’ he cleared his voice, and tried to look cheerful, but failed. ‘You remember,’ he repeated for the third time, ‘what I said to you a week or two ago.’

‘On the Bank, you mean? In the morning? Certainly, I remember that astonishing

announcement. Of all men in the world, you—Oliver—my brother Oliver——’

‘No — never your brother — nor your cousin—nor any relation at all.’

‘My brother—in my own mind, always . . . you told me that you loved me.’

‘I did. And you reproached me on account of . . . about . . . Cassie. You remember that too?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Does that reproach still stand, Althea?’

‘No . . . no . . . no, it does not. I have spoken to Cassie and she declares that there never has been anything between you . . .’

‘Never anything between us. Quite so. Cassie herself says this.’

‘Yet I cannot understand it. It is wonderful. After what I have seen—in her eyes and in her face . . . and in yours, Oliver—could all those signs mean nothing?’

‘You have heard, Cassie says there was never anything between us.’

‘Yet I cannot understand. We all thought . . . well . . . since Cassie says so. But it is wonderful. Almost as wonderful as that you should fancy for a single moment that you are in love with me.’

‘Yet, Althea, that is the case.’

‘Say it once more, Oliver. Look me in the eyes and say it again.’

He stood facing her. She was taller by an inch and more, and as she stood upright, her eyes bent upon him, he seemed half a foot shorter. And his face had got the old ugly look upon it. He to love this girl! As well think that Comus could love the Lady! But he tried to lift his head and to meet her gaze.

‘Althea—I love you’—but his eyes dropped.

She laughed gently not scornfully. ‘No—no,’ she said. ‘There is no love in your voice, Oliver: none in your eyes: and none in your heart. Tell me, what does it mean? Why are you trying to deceive yourself?’

‘I do not understand you, Althea. I tell you that I love you and you laugh at me.’

‘I laugh because it is so ridiculously untrue. And again I ask, Oliver, why you are trying to persuade yourself . . . or me . . .’

‘Pray, Althea, since you are so wise, where did you get your knowledge? How do you know the symptoms of love?’

‘From the books which you despise. From the poets.’

‘Oh! The poets . . . the poets . . . if you are going to believe the inflated rubbish of the poets!’

‘I am quite sure—from the poets—that if a man loves a girl his heart is so softened in thinking of her, that he must show his love in his eyes and in his voice and by his manner. You love me, do you, Oliver? Yet there is no softness in your eyes or in your voice. No—my dear Oliver—we have been brother and sister together a good many years: we will continue brother and sister, if you please.’

‘This comes from living alone. Softened heart! Rubbish! Love, in truth, is the most simple thing in the world. Two persons are attracted towards each other, by the laws of Nature. If the girl is beautiful, as you are, she attracts the man readily. They call this the Power of Beauty. Very good. I am attracted to you by the laws of Nature—which I do not pretend to resist. If you are pleased with me, you will accept me. But we need not talk any nonsense about softening of hearts. Accept me, Althea. You have known me all your life. You have not to find out what kind of man I am: you must know beforehand that I shall do my best to make you happy.’

‘Indeed, Oliver, I do not know that, at all.’

‘You can’t expect to have an angel made on purpose for you. Better to know beforehand the worst that can be said about a man than find out afterwards.’

‘What do you think, now—to be practical—will make me happy?’

Oliver sat down and laughed. He had made the first plunge and was more sure of himself. He was more at ease sitting, because Althea continued to stand, and she was taller than himself and dominated him.

‘If you talk sentimental rubbish,’ he replied, ‘you would be happy with love and the union of two hearts and the mingling of souls and the extravagant worship of a lover. We are not in the Elizabethan age, however. If you talk good honest sense, you want, to make you completely happy, first’—he looked up with a complete return to cheerfulness—‘material comfort. Every woman likes to be warm and well clothed and to have a reasonable certainty about the daily bread and jam. You shall have that, assured. Next, you want a complete change in your life. You are at last—I think the coming of this Australian chap has done it—sick and tired of this hole of a place. You want society, art, travel, and the freshness of new thoughts. Well—I will give you that com-

plete change. 'Confess, now, this is what you want to make you happy.'

'Well, Oliver,' she said, 'you are partly right. Three weeks ago I should have told you that I desired no change. Now, all is altered. It is true. I do most vehemently desire to go away with my father, somewhere—I know not where—anywhere, so that we may see the world and live among cultivated people. This place seems to be choking me—and now, at length, my father is roused from his apathy. Before many days, I am sure, he will be as eager as I can wish to get back to the world. You say I want change. Why, I am myself changed—I know not how. Even my old power of dreaming has left me: you used to laugh at my visions: they do not come to me any longer: my mind is full of new thoughts—I am grown impatient. Yes,' she murmured, 'I want change.'

'Why . . . there . . . there . . . ' said Oliver eagerly, 'half the battle is won. You want change—I will give it to you.'

‘I think not, Oliver. You have known me all my life, as you say, but you have never given me anything: not a thought or a hope—and you never will.’

‘Yes—yes—I will give you all—all that you desire.’

‘No. You are quite mistaken, Oliver,’ she repeated, ‘quite mistaken; you do not love me at all. Two people brought up together, as we have been, cannot fall in love: I am no mystery to you: nor you to me. We know each other too well, my poor boy.’

‘If you mean that I am to expect you to be different from what you are, of course I am not in love. But, Althea, I know you so well that I have no need to imagine graces and virtues. I have seen them and proved them in you.’

‘Really, Oliver? Then you have concealed your admiration very carefully.’

‘Would you have had me speak before the time?’

‘What time?’

‘There is a time for everything. Now, Althea, give me five minutes only—I have my foot on the ladder: I have obtained the lowest post on that ladder of fortune and fame. I have no income yet, to speak of. But that will come. A brief occupation of my present post will lead to something better. I am a Fellow of the Royal Society—the youngest Fellow. The future is clear before me. So much for myself. Now for you. My father, as I am permitted to call him, has spent upon my education the whole of the fortune which was left to him. He has now nothing but the income which he makes by incessant toil among these people for whom he has thrown away his life. Your father has his slender income, it is true, and it will be yours . . .’

‘You mean,’ she interrupted, ‘that it would be a good thing for me if I were to marry you. It is a kind of bargain that you propose.’

‘Hear me out. I should get a wife, for

my part—the woman I love—beautiful and attractive—who would advance me socially. A man like myself, without any backing up of relations, wants such a wife. Why, of course, the chief advantage would be on my side. I willingly own it. No man, Althea, can offer in return for yourself anything in the least its equivalent'—he marred this rather pretty speech by a coldness which took the life and meaning out of it. 'Yet on the whole you would not lose by the . . . the arrangement. Without nonsense about softening of hearts, think of it in this way, Althea.'

She shook her head. 'We waste the time,' she said; 'it is perfectly impossible that I could ever love you.'

'You think so because your head is full of poetic rubbish. Wait a little. When we are engaged your thoughts will begin to dwell about me, and I dare say you will discover all kinds of gifts and graces in your lover that you would pass over in your brother. For instance, you would like your husband to be a distin-

guished man. Very well, I think I may promise you that he shall be distinguished. I will make science a ladder by which to climb to any heights you like.'

'I would certainly like my husband to be distinguished,' Althea replied; 'and yet'. . . No, Oliver. Let there be no more said. I do not love you and you do not love me. What is the use of going on? That is the last word.'

Oliver made no reply. For a few minutes there was silence. Then he played his last card, speaking slowly and distinctly. It was the card he had promised not to play.

'There is one word more. It may influence you. In the next room are two old men who love you, Althea—as much as I do. At this moment they are most anxiously waiting to hear the result of this talk.'

'Where? Do they know?' She changed colour. 'You have told them?'

'I could not attempt to win you, Althea,' he replied with dignity, 'until I had first asked their consent.'

He said this without the appearance of bragging over this virtuous conduct. 'They not only know what I am saying to you, but they have given their consent, and that most readily and heartily. Althea'—he was now speaking with greater animation and the appearance of sincerity—'I declare to you—I am sure you will believe this—there is nothing in the world which would please and rejoice them more. They are growing old: they cannot bear to think that the time may come—and that soon—when they must leave you alone—friendless—and slenderly provided for. In me they see a protector, rather than a lover. Think of these old people, Althea.'

The tears came into her eyes. 'Yes,' she replied, 'I am always thinking of them.'

'That you should be left alone—in such a place—with no other resources than the precarious rent of a few houses in this poor quarter—no wonder they tremble. At this very moment, Althea, I repeat, they are waiting anxiously to know your answer.'

‘Oh! what answer can I give? What should I give? Oliver, you must understand. It is impossible—it is impossible—I could never marry you—because, we could never love each other.’

‘You may change—I am sure you will change—when we are engaged.’

‘No—no—it is impossible. I will tell them so.’

‘And if you did not change we could break the engagement. Can you believe that I would hold you to an engagement if you could not love me?’

‘Well, but, Oliver, girls don’t get engaged only in order to break it off.’

‘No. On the other hand, very few girls have seen their future husband half a dozen times before they become engaged to him. The love comes after—if it comes at all.’

‘No . . . no . . . it is impossible.’

‘Think of my father, Althea. Make him happy in thinking that we are engaged. He believes in me, you know. He thinks I am

going to be the greatest man of science that ever lived—and he thinks that I shall make you happy. For his sake—for your own father's sake, Althea—let us pretend to be engaged until the love that follows will bind us surely.'

'Pretend to be engaged?'

'Why not? There are only our two selves—and these two old men—we have no friends. Such a thing might hurt another girl, but it can do no harm to you. No one at all, outside, shall know it. If you find, afterwards, that it cannot come to anything, we can break it off. But to make them happy, let us pretend.'

'Is it possible?' the girl asked. 'You have actually gone through all this pretence of love only to make your father happy?'

'If you like to think so——'

'It is good of you, Oliver. It was a kind thought. I have never known you to do a kinder thing. But no—it is impossible even to pretend.'

‘Only at first, to make them happy.’

‘To make them happy I would do anything. But this is nonsense.’

‘I will release you whenever you please—nay—I will not consider you as bound to me by any other than a conditional promise. We will tell them that it is conditional. You shall be engaged, Althea, with the understanding that you can step out of it at any moment.’

In the other room, the chess-board was now pushed aside. The Doctor and the Poet, joined now by Laurence, waited in silence for the decision. A hundred times during the day had the young man been tempted to go to the Doctor and say, ‘This adopted son of yours, whom you believe to be working his way to the doctrine of self-sacrifice, is a cold-blooded worshipper of self, the centre of the universe; he is utterly incapable of sacrifice; he has deceived and thrown over the girl whom he once pretended to love; he has no illusions; he is as incapable of honest love as

of self-sacrifice. He is not worthy to be even under the same roof as Althea. Yet you rejoice at the possibility of his marrying her. Should they marry, certain misery awaits her.' Thus and thus did he frame a speech which he might make to the Doctor or to Althea's father. Yet he could not say it. He had no right to interfere. He had learned by accident what Cassie would refuse to confess openly. He had learned by another accident the man's real views. Yet he could not interfere.

They waited, therefore, sitting in the twilight. They waited a whole hour while Oliver, pleading his cause, broke that promise of secrecy as to their wishes. Laurence stood at the window silent, his face, could they have seen it in the twilight, sad and anxious.

Then the old men began to talk.

'It will make a great difference to us,' said her uncle; 'we shall no longer be first in her thoughts.'

'The house will be intolerable if she has

to leave us,' said her father; 'yet we cannot keep her here after she is married.'

'Clement, we must not begin to think of ourselves. The girl's happiness comes first. And the boy, if I know him, will make her happy.'

Laurence at the window groaned.

When the Bell of St. Paul's struck ten, the door was opened and Althea appeared followed by Oliver.

'Congratulate me,' said the lover. 'Althea is engaged to me.'

Althea ran and fell upon her father's neck.

'If it pleases you, dear: if it will make you happy; if it is what you desire——'

'My child, what can we desire but your own happiness?'

Laurence on hearing the fatal announcement instantly stepped quickly and quietly out of the room.

'And we are not really engaged,' Althea

explained. 'It is only—if it will make you happier—a conditional promise.'

'A promise——' said Oliver, 'a promise—with conditions.'

'If I find that I can love him—after a time—we are not in any hurry—and if he finds that he really loves me—but I don't think he ever will—we shall be married. If I find that I cannot love him at any time—to-day or to-morrow—I am free—that is all. We are not engaged unless—— My dear father, are you satisfied?'

With such conditions and loopholes and hedging round of happiness, ought not the fondest father to be satisfied? It was, however, a pity—a great pity—that Laurence had not stayed another minute in the room.

'And where,' asked the Doctor after taking his share of the kissing, 'where is Mr. Waller? He was here only five minutes ago.'

‘He is no longer here,’ said Oliver softly.
‘When he heard my words he ran away.
Doubtless he thought he would not intrude
on a family occasion so completely private
as this.’

CHAPTER XIII

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART

WHEN Laurence heard those words and saw the triumphant face of the successful wooer he fled. He ran away. We are so far still children of nature that we cannot always suddenly force ourselves to preserve outward calmness, whatever happens. Still it would have been better had he waited. Then he would have heard the modifications of that boastful announcement. But he fled. He did not dare to look at Althea. He broke away—*evasit—erupit*—he vanished.

This, then, was the end: a rude awakening: for this, he had gone on day after day, every day, sometimes all day long, thinking no danger, lulled and lapped in security, enjoying the sweet companionship of this girl. To be

sure, not one word of love had been exchanged : yet he had fallen into a dreamy safety.—Why not ? This girl had no lovers : she knew no other young man, except Oliver, and as regards that young man, Laurence felt no jealousy : why should he ? Oliver, who seldom came to the house, was a kind of brother. Besides, he knew very well—any man would find this out for himself—that the girl regarded him with friendly eyes if not with the favour which he desired. There was no hurry. Even to be engaged to her would bring him little more than the privilege which he already enjoyed, of gazing upon her, worshipping her, and speaking freely and openly with her about every other subject. Nay, until this day he knew not the depth and devoutness of his worship. When he understood this, he learned also that the discovery came too late. His castle was of Spanish architecture—or it was a castle of cards—and at a touch it fell, tumbling about his ears. Therefore he fled.

He did not, at first, go far. When the residents of Bank Side feel happy and the weather is fine and the evenings light, they stand beside the river and look across and up or down. When they are crushed they carry their wounded spirits to the same spot and seek sympathy of silver-footed Thamesis, sweet Thames, running softly, great Father of the British Floods.

What did Cassie in her great trouble? She crept out alone at night and wept over the river thinking that no one would find her there. 'Twas a leading case. Laurence did the same. That is, he did not weep, but he leaned over the wall and resigned his soul to bitterness. Althea was lost—he had thrown away by his own folly—by his procrastination—such a chance as never came to any man before. By his own miserable folly, he thought, Althea was lost to him. The evening should have been black and thunderous: it was a fine evening after a splendid day: the air was balmy: no night, but a soft twilight,

hanging over the city which deepened the shadows and softened the outlines and filled all happy mortals with a sense of repose. There is this strange quality about Nature that when her mood fits our own we take it as sympathetic and kindly intentioned in her : and when her mood is not ours, we are not irritated therefor, but we take no notice at all of her. That she rejoices with us fills our hearts with gladness : that she will not weep with us offends us not.

Althea was engaged. Therefore, Laurence had no perception or sense of beauty in the river under the soft twilight. She was engaged to the man who had no illusions. Love? How could such a man love such a woman? Oh! most unhappy girl—what would be her fate with Oliver?—and oh! most unhappy lover! what his own without Althea? The water lapped the breezes softly and glowed in the evening light, but Laurence heeded it not.

There are many men whom we always, and

instinctively, dislike from the very first: we do not invite them to enter our house: we do not willingly sit down to break bread with them: the dislike is a dull and smouldering fire: these men do not actually give us pain by their presence or their existence until something happens which kindles the smouldering embers into flames. Then, dull dislike flares out into burning hate. Just so this young man's dislike of his fortunate rival was now changed into a most active and lively hatred.

When one is in very great trouble and misery: when one is sick and knows not what may be coming next: when one is much harassed by work the mind assumes a curious habit of seeing and dwelling upon trifles. For instance, Laurence presently discovered that he had turned his back upon the river and was now gazing across the road. Through the open window he saw his cousins assembled. Cornelia, he observed, sat with her hands in her lap, as if she was still sitting in her chair at

the Church door—it is complained of all ecclesiastics that they cannot shake their calling out of their looks, their garb, and their manners. This reverend lady sat every evening thus bolt upright, without book or work, as she sat all day. An austere, if dignified, manner of life. Her brother sat opposite her, reading the evening paper. It was the *Globe* which he generally brought home with him and he read it right through, thoughtfully, as much interested in one country as in another and in one subject as another. This catholic spirit he inherited from his father, for the Principal of an Academy should know everything. In one window Flavia trimmed a hat, holding it up to the light, turning it round. She was not clever at work and would fain have sought assistance of Cassie, whose genius lay in millinery. But Cassie sat in the other window silent, sad, and heavy-eyed.

While he gazed upon the group Cassie turned her head and saw him. Then she rose

and went out to him, carrying her hat by the strings.

‘What is the matter, Mr. Waller?’ she asked.

‘What should be the matter, Cass?’ he replied, clearing his throat with a show of cheerfulness.

‘Something is wrong. I saw it from the window. What is it? I hear it in your voice. Is it—is it—anything to do with Althea?’

‘I am out here to breathe the night air. It is a fine night, is it not? I like the river best when the tide is nearly at its full. Then the water is freshest and the wind seems to come straight up from the German Ocean, doesn’t it?’

‘Mr. Waller.’

‘Oh, you asked me if anything had happened. Well, nothing that we could not expect—I forgot, you see, that I am a stranger and they have been together from childhood and the two old men want it so very much.

But it is nothing to me. How should it be? I have only been here six weeks or so. Pity I did not suspect it—but how should I?’

‘What is it, then?’

‘It doesn’t matter to you either, since that business is all over with you. You have left off lamenting the scoundrel who——’

‘Mr. Waller.’

‘And now he has told the same tale to the girl whom——’

‘To Althea?’

‘Of course. And they are engaged. That is what I have just learned.’

‘Althea! Oh! I never thought—I could not think that Althea—of all women in the world—Althea——’

‘Don’t blame her—Cassie, child—don’t blame her,’ said Laurence, hoarsely. ‘I cannot bear that the least blame.——’

‘I am not blaming her at all. Oh! Mr. Waller, I blame myself. For she came and implored me to tell if there was anything—anything at all—between Oliver and me—she

wanted to know why I was so unhappy. It was all her love and kindness. And I declared that there was nothing and never had been anything. I told her that falsehood—again and again.'

'Poor child,' said Laurence.

'Oh! I am a wretch. If I had only told her the truth this would never have happened. But I was ashamed. And now I have made you miserable too.'

'You have made Althea miserable, Cassie. Never mind me. She will be miserable for life.'

'How can she be unhappy if she loves him and he loves her?'

'But she cannot love him. It is impossible.'

'You do not know him, Mr. Waller,' said the girl. 'You think of him hardly because he has—made a mistake—about me—he thought he loved me, you see, and he did not. But of course he loves Althea—any man would—and he is so clever and so bright that

any girl would easily be led on to love him, especially if she were led on as he led me on.'

'I think I know him even better than you, and I assure you, Cassie, he is not a man to be led away by any fancies.' Here, it will be observed, Laurence made the not unnatural mistake of taking a man at his own professions. Oliver declared that love was an illusion. Did it follow that he was never to fall into that sweet illusion? 'He does not love Althea and he never loved you. He loves himself—his own wretched self.'

'Well—but you did love her. And oh! Mr. Waller, why did you not tell her so?'

'I thought she knew it.'

'How could she know it for certain unless you tell her? Why, think, Mr. Waller. If a girl make such a mistake as that, how wretched she may be—look at me. Besides, Althea never talked or thought of such things. She isn't like other girls who are always talking about love. Oh! how could you go on so long and never speak a word?'

‘I have been a fool, Cassie. And I have lost her—and yet—I cannot understand——’

‘Perhaps her father——’

‘Yes—yes—her father and the Doctor wished it. That is the only explanation. But does that explain why he should——’ he paused. ‘Unless perhaps he was found out.’

‘What is there to find out?’

‘There is a little fact which the Doctor and Mr. Indagine have kept to themselves. But I know it. I think it explains our friend’s sudden change—well, Cassie, it is no longer any concern of mine. I must try and forget her. The story is finished, I suppose—I must go away home again. Perhaps, after a bit, I shall forget. The story is finished. What a pity! What an ending! Now if I were to write that story I would end it so differently.’

‘How would you end it?’

‘I would turn Althea’s heart to the man who does love her. And as for you, Cass, I would harden your heart to the man who has deceived you, and I would make you gay and

light-hearted once more—and bring along a prince for you.’

‘Oh,’ she murmured. ‘That can never be. But oh, Mr. Waller, I am so sorry for you—oh! so very very sorry. You brought us all such happiness, and now it is all gone, and you are only made miserable. Oh, I am sorry you ever came here!’

Laurence laid his hand upon the shapely head—it is the action of a brother—and sighed.

‘Don’t cry, dear girl,’ he said, after a while. ‘Don’t cry, Cass. It is all over and done with. But we are always friends, whatever happens. You have lost—I have lost—we have both lost. We conjugate the past tense of the verb to lose. We are all the more friends over our common loss.’

She gave him her hand, without more words, and left him.

He stayed on the Bank long after the lights in the house were put out and the residents of the Academy had gone to bed ;

after the trains had ceased to run in and out of Cannon Street; till the silence of night had fallen upon the great City and its river. The silence falls about one o'clock and it ceases—London Silence being like the Summer of Labrador—exactly an hour later, at two of the clock, when the market carts begin to rumble through the street. Finally, in great dejection and with the most bitter self-reproaches, he went up to his own room and so to bed.

It is an aggravation of misery that one must always undress, go to bed, get up and dress again, whatever the condition of mind. For a woman it is worse than for a man. Fancy a poor forlorn maiden, whose lover has left her, having to choose her frock and her ribbons, just as if she was going once more to meet him, to walk among the dewy meadows, to gather the wild rose and to hear the blithe song of the lark, her hand in his—Poor child! She is left forlorn: and she has got to do her hair prettily just the same.

Laurence went to bed and instantly fell fast asleep. But he woke with the weight and suffocation of a horrid nightmare which sat upon his chest and choked him. It took the form of Althea—to think that Althea, so fair, so calm, so sweet, should become a nightmare. It was in this way. He saw himself, just as usual rowing with Althea, walking with her, sitting beside her, talking to her father while she sat listening or playing to them. Always Althea met his gaze of overpowering love with the same calm unconsciousness, as if there were no such thing at all as love, as if she had never heard of love. And yet when she got out of the boat, or when their walk was finished, or while they still sat talking, Oliver came in and Althea suffered him to stand on tiptoe in order to kiss her. This kiss was the nightmare: and it continued after he awoke: it became a thought so full of torture that he could no longer lie in bed.

He pulled back the curtains. It was half-past four: the sun was already rising—but he

had no eye for the glory of that phenomenon : besides, Cannon Street Railway Bridge spoils the sunrise for Bank Side. He threw open the window and breathed the sweet morning air : the river ran bright and sparkling under the blue sky, crisped by the fresh breeze : the spires and steeples rose clearly outlined : the Cathedral showed every column and every window sharply defined. On the Bank there lounged slowly, because he had no bed and was hungry and on the prowl for what he could pick up, an unclean bird of night, who saw with envy all those barges lying unguarded, actually waiting to be stolen, and remembered with regret that there was not a single fence in the whole of London where he could place a barge if he should fake it. So he crept on his way.

Laurence watched him with interest. The sight of the poor wretch diverted his thoughts. When he had disappeared they returned to the old subject. He *could* not go on as if nothing had happened. What should he do, then ?

In some cases there is only one thing to do—namely, to run away. I am always surprised that more people do not run away. There are lots of retreats and refuges for run-aways—with nice casual wards in case they have got through their money. And it is a remedy so truly efficacious. You can go right away, where the wicked cease from troubling: where the importunate creditor cannot find you: where the woman you loved and have lost cannot torment you with the sight of her happy face—not that you would wish to see it miserable: where you will read no more nasty ones on your last failure: where the weary take off their boots and are at rest—who would not wish for such a place of repose, such a haven of refuge? Some men, however, stay on: they meanly stick to their business: they meet the assaults of the wicked with fists and sticks: they compass revenge: in love matters they wait—they actually wait—until by the help of time, and the pricks and stabs of other worries, they can

get over it. It is true they always do get over it. But how much better to have run away!

Laurence resolved to run away. 'The story is told,' he said. 'I, who thought to play the principal part, am out of it altogether. I can go, now. I will put the river and a great many streets between Althea and myself. I will even'—he sighed heavily—'I will put the ocean between us. I will go away this very morning.'

You cannot go away anywhere at half-past four in the morning, especially from Bank Side, where there are no cabs. The love-sick young man was therefore constrained to go to bed again. Such is the flatness of things. The most dramatic incidents in life have to be interrupted by the small necessities of packing, getting the luggage out of the house, eating, paying bills, and seeing that you have got small change for the journey.

Laurence, however, his mind once made up, went back to bed and fell instantly asleep and had no more nightmares.

In the evening, when the various members of the family returned, they received the following report from Sempronius.

The boy deposed that he was reading when Mr. Waller came downstairs about half-past nine. He was looking grumpy : but he said nothing : he rang the bell for breakfast and walked to the window, where he stood looking out with his hands in his pockets. He was evidently very grumpy. When breakfast came he poured out a cup of tea, broke off the top of an egg, looked at it and pushed it away.

‘The Selected at ten a shilling, too,’ said Flavia. ‘Shameful!’

‘He took some bread and butter, drank his tea, and finished breakfast.’

‘Then,’ the boy continued, ‘he turned round to me and he said “Boy,” says he, with his usual cheek, “you may tell your father I’ve had a business letter and I’ve got to leave unexpectedly. No, I’ll write that—” So he went upstairs and came down presently with a letter which he put on the mantel-

shelf. There it is.' The letter was certainly there in confirmation of this statement. 'Then he asked me if I would mind going as far as Blackfriars Station to get a Hansom for him—which I did. He had got on his hat and his boots when I came back with the cab, and he'd packed up his portmanteau and got it downstairs. Well, he didn't laugh or make any joke or anything; but he pulled out his purse and he gave me a sovereign—a whole sovereign!—Here it is.' No doubt of it; there was the sovereign in evidence. 'And he said, "Good-bye, boy, give the letter to your father," and with that he got into the cab and drove away.'

'Didn't he leave any message for Cassie and me?' asked Flavia.

'No, he didn't.'

'Nor any for Althea?'

'No—not any message for anybody. But he gave me a whole sovereign.'

'Then,' said Flavia, with more than her usual sagacity, 'something must have happened.

The letter being opened proved the truth of the boy's statement. Mr. Waller was actually gone in a manner as unexpected and as startling as he had come.

‘Dear Mr. Cottle,’ he said.

‘I have to apologise for leaving you so hurriedly. An unexpected piece of news has obliged me to go away at once. I shall have to leave London and shall not be able to return for any stay with you before I go home to Sydney. But I hope to wish you farewell.

‘Meanwhile I thank you all most sincerely for your great kindness to me, a complete stranger: I have completed the business which brought me to Bank Side: I can make no excuse for staying any longer. My stay has been one of very great pleasure throughout. Pray thank your sister and your daughters for all they have done for me. The inclosed will, I hope, relieve me of my pecuniary liabilities to you.

‘Very sincerely yours,

‘LAURENCE WALLER.’

Lucius opened the cheque. 'He has paid for five weeks in advance,' he said. 'But he has gone! Children, it is pleasant to receive a cheque for five weeks in advance. But we would rather have him back again.'

'Oh,' Flavia sighed, 'he is gone. But the cheque will come in handy. He is gone. Well, it is something to remember. For once in our lives we have known a man who isn't always hard up.'

Sempronius felt the sovereign in his pocket. There are possible consolations, even for the departure of a lodger and a friend. A whole sovereign! But Cassie, who alone knew the secret of his departure, hung her head.

'My dears,' said Lucius, with troubled voice. 'The house seems empty without him. How shall we make up for his loss? He has gone. Mr. Waller has left us. We repeat the words but we cannot understand them. We know that he is gone, but we are not yet sure of it. We are thus strikingly reminded of the mutability of all earthly things. They

are fleeting: in fact they fleet and—and—mutable—in the most unexpected manner. We might have known that we could not keep him, and he would not keep us, always. Five and thirty shillings a week in addition was too good to last: and such a friend too great fortune for us: yet that he should go so soon, just as we had learned to trust and to esteem him!’

‘And just,’ said Flavia, ‘as he was beginning to show an interest in Aunt Claudia.’

‘I am thankful,’ said the other aunt, ‘to think that he has seen the Church. I showed him the carvings and the Body.’

‘He enlivened us,’ said Lucius. ‘We laughed while he was here. Why, I think we had forgotten how to laugh. Let us now remember that cheerfulness is a duty: it is peculiar to man—and to the hyæna—to laugh. Mirthful moments give relief to the brain: it is good to be merry. And he told us stories. In his company, children, we have travelled. We have wandered with him over the plains

of Australia : we have sailed across the Indian Ocean : we have steamed, always with him, through the Suez Canal.'

'And now,' said Flavia, 'he has left us more dismal than we were before he came.'

'I dreamed,' said Cornelia, gloomily, 'a week ago, that the house was hung with black. A sure sign that some one would be taken.'

'Well, Aunt,' said Flavia sharply, 'he isn't dead that we know of. And now you come to think about it—there was no letter for him this morning—where did he get the news which called him away? It hadn't come last night or he would have told us. How was he called away? No one came for him. There was no letter. It isn't like him to do things secretly. Something may have driven him away. It couldn't be any one in this house. Could it be Felix? I don't think so. What has happened, I wonder?'

'We do not know,' said her father. 'It is idle to seek. I repeat that we ourselves,'

he looked at Cassie—‘should take example of a cheerfulness which——’

‘Here is Althea,’ said Flavia. ‘Althea, oh! he’s gone. Mr. Waller gone.’

‘Gone? Mr. Waller gone? Oh! why has he gone?’

Cassie looked up sharply. There was not the least sign of consciousness in Althea’s face. If she knew, if she suspected, she must be the greatest actress that ever lived—to preserve a look of such complete and blank unconsciousness.

‘We don’t know,’ Flavia replied. ‘And we cannot understand. He is gone. That’s all.’

‘Gone without coming to see us? Why, my father is expecting him this evening. Oh! but he will return.’

‘Perhaps,’ he says, ‘to bid us good-bye. That’s all.’

‘He has gone,’ said Lucius. ‘He has left a noble cheque. But I would rather he had stayed.’

‘He has gone,’ said Cassie feebly. ‘Something must have driven him away.’

‘He gave me a sovereign,’ said Sempromius. ‘He wouldn’t have done that if he was coming back again.’

‘My father has got a poem to read to him,’ said Althea. ‘Oh! who will take Mr. Waller’s place at home? Why did he go?’

‘We do not know at all,’ Flavia repeated. ‘No letters came for him this morning and no messengers called. Yet he says that he has received news which obliges him to go away.’

‘There may have been something in the morning paper, then,’ said Althea. ‘Something about his father, who is a great man out in Australia.’

‘We never asked him about his father,’ said Flavia.

‘His father is the Prime Minister of New South Wales. His name is Sir David Waller. He told Oliver so.’

‘Indeed?’ Lucius looked up with revived interest. ‘This is interesting. The son of

Sir David—Sir—David—Waller. Dear me! This is most gratifying. Children, we have entertained the son of a nobleman. I thought—I always did think—that there was in his manner and appearance a something which only noble blood confers.’

‘Well,’ Althea laughed. ‘I do not think there was much noble blood in Mr. Waller’s descent.’

‘Children,’ Lucius continued. ‘This is a great honour for us. Since the days when the nobility and aristocracy came here to witness the performance of Shakespeare’s plays, the Bank has been deserted by the Great. Really—it is a memorable occasion in the Chronicles of the time-hallowed quarter. And in this house! In the Academy!’

At this point Cornelia suddenly jumped clean out of her chair as if some one had stuck a pin in her. One feels a kind of shame in recording so undignified a thing of the lady, but she did it, with a little cry.

‘Sister!’ said Lucius in amazement.

Cornelia sat down again. 'I know now,' she cried breathlessly, 'I know why I recognised the voice directly I heard it. The voice and the eyes. Brother, are we blind? They are the eyes and the voice of my cousin Lucy.'

'Lucy, my dear Sister? But she went away long ago. She left Mr. Norbery and got married. It is thirty years ago. And this young man is the son of Sir David Waller, Sir — David — Waller — Prime Minister — actually—Prime Minister—of the Colony of New South Wales. Our cousin Lucy, if she lives still, must be in—ahem!—humble circumstances. We were always—up to a certain point—kind to Lucy and her sister, but they were, remember, Cornelia, in a humble position, though our cousins.'

'Until Lucy became a snake in the grass,' said Cornelia. 'But for her, Mr. Norbery would, I believe——'

Her brother waved his hand. 'Until that time, then,' he said with dignity, 'we were

kind to Lucy and she was grateful. On Sunday she was always welcome to tea. We still wish her well in her present humble position, and in case of need we would again extend our protection. But, Cornelia——'

‘He’s got Lucy’s voice and he’s got Lucy’s eyes. Stuff and rubbish about Sir David Waller and noblemen and Prime Ministers! Lucy’s voice and Lucy’s eyes!’

CHAPTER XIV

IN TIME OF TEMPTATION

MR. JOSEPH MAYES sat in his room at the back of his office. He was resting after the day's work. He had that day sold up a green-grocer, and kindly laid the foundation of ruin for a draper—in a manner which would have done credit to his predecessor. There was therefore a glow of satisfaction in his heart. He was now taking his well-earned pleasure. The fair goddess Pleasure assumes as many shapes as there be figures of mortal men. To every one of us she is our own veritable effigies engaged in doing continually the thing which at the time we love the most. This occupation she varies from age to age, but to millions of honest Britons she taketh the form of a middle-aged or elderly man sitting in an

arm-chair with a pipe, a glass of cold without, and the evening paper. The first essential of pleasure is rest: the second, tobacco: the third, drink. All these may be combined with vacuity of mind. But when one gets to the intellectual level of Mr. Mayes, there must be food for the brain. Therefore, the evening paper. And, because of that intellectual level it was the sprightliest, spiciest and, consequently, the most truthful of the halfpenny organs.

Mr. Mayes, therefore, rested. He was at peace with all mankind. The shallow observer doubts whether a money-lender can be at peace with the world, and therefore his own conscience. Why not? He gets nothing but his bond—his legal rights. It is the business of the good tradesman to buy cheap and to sell dear: the money-lender lets out bags of gold on lease: he asks as big a rent as he can expect to get. He receives, instead of money down, a promise to pay. When he exacts the fulfilment of that promise, why

should the debtor curse him, rage at him, and call him sweater, oppressor of the poor, and usurer? Whatever they called him, Mr. Mayes cared nothing. He was at peace with all the world. Though the greengrocer whom he had sold up was at that moment raging and gnashing his teeth, he felt no enmity towards that greengrocer. Not at all. He had seen so much of this passion, that he felt like a doctor in a hospital or a turnkey in a prison. But the unruffled calm of his soul was to be disturbed, and that in the most unexpected and the most bewildering manner. You shall hear.

In the room upstairs, where there were the pile of papers, the single chair and the table, sat beneath the gas-jet the Chevalier. He wore his flat cloth cap, and for convenience of reading, though in the day time he did not use them, he wore spectacles. He also had a pipe in his mouth, an old-fashioned German pipe with a big bowl. In his capacity as cook he had his stated hours, but in that

of clerk he had none: it was therefore not unusual with him to spend his whole evenings in the room reading through the papers. Why not? He had nowhere else to go: his work was almost mechanical and caused no fatigue: he was as comfortable in that room as if he were wandering among the streets: alone with the papers he could think. Perhaps, as he turned over the pages and plodded through the deeds, looking for nothing but the name of Mr. Norbery, his mind went back to the old, old days before the fatal '48, when he danced and made love, feasted, gambled, drank, squandered and conspired, as light-hearted and as careless as any of his Magyar race. Perhaps he asked himself what had been the outcome of that year of Revolution, defeat, and bloodshed. Perhaps he remembered his own broad lands which had gone to the hands that in Hungary grasp all—those of the usurer—and smiled to think that he himself in his old age had gone the same way as his estates.

Who knoweth the thoughts of an old man? Too soon—too soon—we shall learn them for ourselves—the regrets, the memories, the heart-sinkings, the repentance that pass in endless procession through his brain. No old man has ever yet written of his age: no old woman has ever yet attempted to arrest and set down on paper her flying thoughts—they are not all, I suppose, regrets, like those of the Belle Heaulmière, for her vanished beauty.

Ainsi le bon temps regrettons
Entre nous pauvres vieilles sottes.

Many old men write Reminiscences. They are not at all what we want. We have all been young: we all begin to store up our reminiscences as soon as we begin to have any memory at all: let us know what the old man thinks about as he sits in his leather chair beside the fire; when the workers have gone forth to their toil and the room is quiet, while outside the sun falls upon spring blossoms and the lark sings in the sky, and the clock

ticks in the corner, and the dog dreams on the hearthrug, and the ashes drop and the coal cracks in the grate.

The Chevalier made no haste : nor did he take rest : he plodded on, opening one paper, reading it and tossing it, if it did not contain the name of Mr. Norbery, into the right-hand corner. If it did, he laid it aside for further examination if necessary. But as yet he had chanced upon nothing of the least importance. They were the papers which showed the life work of two very industrious persons : yet they were now of not the least use to anybody. This, as Mr. Vicesimus Cottle might have observed, is the way of man. He toils and moils with a mighty fuss, mopping his brows and puffing and panting, and behold ! when he has been dead a year or two the whole of his work is useless and forgotten as much as the crops of golden grain which have been forced to grow by the farmer and have long since been garnered, thrashed, ground, made into loaves and baked and devoured.

The pile on the table at the Chevalier's left hand continually decreased. That on the right-hand corner continually grew bigger. The papers on the shelves gave promise of much more work for many a day to come. He finished one bundle—there was nothing in it—only the papers connected with some old mortgage, bill of sale and so forth—and threw it into the corner. Then he took up the next bundle.

This time he paused and smiled oddly. The Chevalier generally smiled sadly. This time it was the smile cynical, which gave a novel expression to his face.

He took up the bundle lying next to hand, turned it over curiously, and examined the exterior with more care than seemed necessary. In appearance it was much the same as the other papers: there was the discoloration of age and some fading of the ink, but not much; the tape which tied the papers together had lost its colour. The Chevalier, noting these signs, smiled again. Something

amused him. Perhaps something in his own mind : a reminiscence of the past.

Then he slowly untied the tape and opened the bundle. Within were several papers. One of these was a document engrossed on parchment : it was endorsed ‘Last Will and Testament of Samuel Norbery.’

‘Last Will and Testament of Samuel Norbery,’ the Chevalier read three times over. Then he laid it down. ‘This is very interesting,’ he said. ‘I am glad that I waited for the paper to take its proper turn. Yes——’ He examined a corner of the outside sheet which had been folded over and showed a few lines written in very small character. ‘Yes : there is no doubt. This is indeed remarkable. Now I think I know who is Mr. Norbery’s heir. Fortunate young man ! Fortunate indeed ! Yet—who knows ? I think there are not many in Southwark who can write the Magyar tongue——’ He looked at the writing in the corner. ‘Who knows ? Fortune is deceitful. Now she smiles. And

then, again, she frowns. Who knows if the Heir is indeed fortunate ?'

He spread open the paper upon the table and began to read it with great care. Suddenly his face expressed the utmost astonishment. 'Is it possible?' he cried. 'Why—what can this mean? Have I mistaken the packet? That is quite impossible. I marked it instantly and wrote this note upon it when he left the room. What does it mean?'

There were two other inclosures in the packet. One of these was an ordinary letter, folded and endorsed 'Directions for Mr. Norbery's Will:' the other was a packet of three or four big blue sheets pinned together, and endorsed 'Draft of Mr. Norbery's Will.'

Then the Chevalier rose and, taking these documents in his hand, he descended the stairs.

'Oh!' said Mayes, turning his head languidly, mind and body being now completely at rest. 'You think you've found something, do you? You've found something. Well, now, Chevalier, won't it keep till to-morrow?'

‘I think it will keep if you wish it. And I also think that you will be glad to have it now.’

‘Out with it then—’ He stretched out his hand. ‘Give it over. Well now, Chevalier, I’ve been thinking that you might find something before long if only to pay for your keep. Hand it over—what is it, man? What are you looking so mighty mysterious about?’

‘It is called the last Will and Testament of Samuel Norbery,’ the Chevalier replied gravely.

‘What?’ Mr. Mayes dropped his pipe, which broke into fragments, and upset his gin-and-water. But he heeded not either disaster. ‘What?’ he repeated. ‘Say that again.’

‘The document which I have found on the table,’ replied the Chevalier gravely, ‘is endorsed “Last Will and Testament of Samuel Norbery.”’

‘Oh!’ Mr. Mayes leaned forward with staring eyes and red cheeks. ‘Oh! At last!’ he groaned, but not with pain or sorrow.

‘I have opened and read it,’ the Chevalier went on. ‘It is witnessed by yourself.’

‘Ay—by myself—and by Backler’s clerk.’

‘And by Mr. Backler’s clerk. It is dated——’

‘Give it over, Chevalier. Let me have it.’ Mr. Mayes clutched the paper greedily. ‘Oh! I knew it would be found at last. Yet how could it escape? They searched all through the old man’s papers and through Backler’s papers and couldn’t find it. Yet here it is, a big bundle, endorsed outside. Chevalier, how could a big bundle like this get mislaid? You might as well mislay a barge loaded with petroleum casks on the Bank. It’s a very curious thing.’ He turned over the papers as if their appearance would enlighten him. ‘What shelf did it come from?’

‘I found it on the table.’

‘Well—anyhow—here it is. Lord! I remember signing it. And now we shall know how he left his money. Somebody will be a lucky man when this will is proved. But

it's got to leave my hands first. His last will. I remember as if it was only yesterday when it was signed.' He nursed the bundle like a baby while he allowed his memory to go back to the past. 'It was signed in Lawyer Backler's office—his own room at the back. How in the world could a great big paper like this get lost? To be sure, when he went silly with so much rum-and-water anything might have got lost. Yet such a paper as this—with such an endorsement—and us all searching everywhere. Where did you find it?'

'Among the papers on my table,' the Chevalier repeated.

'It was in the lawyer's own room, I remember,' Mr. Mayes went on regardless of the correction—now pleasantly launched upon the sea of memory. 'It is thirty years ago. Yet I remember the very morning. It was a baking day in summer——'

'In winter,' said the Chevalier.

'How the devil should you know? You weren't there. You were dodging the police

in your own country—that's what you were doing. A scorching hot day it was. We'd just put in an execution for a young fellow—Chemist he was with a shop in Newcomer Street. The Chemist he went on like a madman, I remember, and his wife cried and said they were ruined. Mr. Norbery spoke up like a father, as he always did: told him it would be a lesson for the future against extravagance and getting into debt, and if he borrowed money of honest people he must pay it back—and so on. It was beautiful to hear Mr. Norbery rebuking one of his clients for extravagance while he was selling him up. I never could reach to it, never.' Mr. Mayes sighed. 'Afterwards the Chemist couldn't get a place and he went and made a hole in the river. From Southwark Bridge, he did, and his wife went off her chump. Well—when we'd done with their job, the Guv'nor turned short on me, "Mayes," he says, "you've got to witness my will," and we walked together to Backler's office in the Bridge Road. Thirty

years ago it was. I remember it was the time when he'd got his dead wife's cousin for his housekeeper—Lucy—what was her name? And she offended the old man by marrying a chap down at Rotherhithe—a boat-builder he was, Waller by name, and the old man sold him up too, pretty sharp, just to let him know that you couldn't go against Mr. Norbery for nothing. But I never heard what became of them. This was the Will I signed'—he patted the document tenderly. 'Lord! To think that it's found. Chevalier, I'm most afraid to open it. Yet there can't be anything for me in it. That's certain. I wonder how he left his money. I remember how I signed it. Mr. Backler's clerk—he's dead now—died three years ago in the workhouse—he signed first and I signed next.'

'No,' said the Chevalier, 'you signed first.'

'What are you keeping on interrupting for? Don't I tell you I remember his signing first?'

'Look at the will then.'

Mr. Mayes opened it. The Chevalier was

right. His own signature came before, not after, that of the unfortunate Pauper.

‘Well now,’ said Mr. Mayes, ‘that shows what memory will do. Now if you’d put me in the box I’d ha’ sworn that I signed last. Lord! I remember as well as . . . and here’s just the contrary. Why—I was no more than twenty-five or so, but I knew a little about Law, and I knew that if I was a witness there could be nothing for me, and I did think that after I’d served the Guv’nor since I was twelve he might have remembered me with a trifle. Not he! Well now, that’s a queer trick for memory to serve me. Yes, there’s the old man’s signature—his “s” like print, with a dot at both ends: and his “y” with a curly tail and a dot on both sides of the tail: and there’s mine—though I didn’t think I wrote so well in those days. Mine is a hand that improves by practice. No, I certainly thought I had a clumsy fist in those days.’

‘You said it was on a summer morning,’ said the Chevalier.

‘A summer morning it was.’

‘Look at the will then,’ the Chevalier repeated.

He pointed to the date. Mr. Mayes read and looked as one who finds the solid earth sinking beneath his feet. ‘Lord!’ he cried. ‘I’m wrong again—“December the eighteenth!” Why, I’d ha’ sworn—there was the Chemist and the shop: the man sputtering with rage and his wife all of a tremble—and—and the hot sunshine out o’ doors. Why, I remember walking in the shade. Chevalier, what’s the meaning of it? Do you think I’ve got a softening? To be sure it was thirty years ago.’

‘Eight,’ said the Chevalier.

‘Thirty, you fool!’ Mr. Mayes turned very red at the third correction of fact. ‘How the devil should you know?’

‘Look at the will again.’

‘Mr. Mayes looked again. The full date was December the eighteenth 1879. He gazed upon the date with open mouth. He could

say nothing. He was quite confounded. For his memory had changed eight years into thirty : it had changed winter into summer : his own age from twenty-five to forty-seven : and his own signature from second to first. These are very wonderful tricks for memory to play.

He looked at the Chevalier and shook his head, because language failed him.

‘I leave it with you,’ said the clerk. ‘I shall go to bed.’

‘Stop—stop. Tell me first—before I read it—am I awake and in my senses?—tell me—how did the old man leave his money?’

‘He left it all to Althea, daughter of Clement Indagine, to be paid over to her on the day when she should marry and change her name. Meantime, until her marriage, the whole was to be in the hands of trustees.’

‘Who are the trustees?’

‘Backler the Solicitor, and you—Joseph Mayes. But there’s more in the Will.’

‘Go away,’ said Mr. Mayes faintly. ‘Go

away, Chevalier—I must—I must read it for myself.’

He read it through three times. First he read it as quickly as he could—being but a slow reader at the best. Then he read it twice over more slowly. Then he put the Will aside and read the other documents—Mr. Norbery’s own letter of instructions and the Solicitor’s draft.

Never in all his life had he been so bewildered. He remembered the hot summer morning, the wailing of the Chemist’s wife, the signature of the lawyer’s clerk followed by his own, in Mr. Backler’s office, thirty years before. But for the life of him he could not remember the winter morning eight years ago, when he signed first.

‘I could have sworn——’ he repeated. In fact many times over he did swear. And yet, the Will dated Dec. 18, 1879, stared him in the face.

For the moment the disposition of the Will hardly concerned him. He was trying to re-

member—and he could in no way remember—signing that Will. Eight years ago, not thirty. And he himself appointed Trustee, with nothing for his trouble. That little fact, certainly, was exactly like the old man.

Only eight years ago, and yet he could not remember: while of the previous Will, that made thirty years before, destroyed, no doubt, in favour of the new Will, he remembered all those details which he had set forth. A very strange situation, a truly original and previously unheard-of situation, that a Will should have been found after the Treasury people had searched everywhere: a Will not thrust away in some corner, but lying boldly among other papers: a Will witnessed by himself: only eight years ago—and yet he could not remember anything, not the least thing in the world about it.

Bewildered with this extraordinary trick of memory, Mr. Mayes stimulated his brain with a drink—with two—three drinks. Before going to bed he had succeeded in recall-

ing all the circumstances of the case : he saw, quite clearly, the old lawyer ; the lawyer's clerk, also an old man ; Mr. Norbery bent with age, a tottering old man, gathered together with himself, in the lawyer's office, the Will spread out upon the table : outside, a cold December morning with snow and sleet. Yet, curiously, when he took up the pen to witness the signature, the figures in the interesting group were transformed, and the season was changed as if in a scene at the Pantomime. It was a hot morning in summer : the lawyer and his clerk and Mr. Norbery himself were no longer old men, but in the prime of life—Mr. Norbery especially upright and straight, iron grey, fifty years of age : and he himself a young man, in appearance a working man, who wrote with difficulty and handled a pen with less freedom than a chisel.

He carried the Will to bed with him and put it under his pillow. But he was unable to sleep. When he dropped at last into an

uneasy slumber he dreamed a hundred disquieting and uncomfortable things. And he awoke at six o'clock with a start, and sat up broad awake at once, fancying that he had not yet even read the Will.

He read it through very carefully. 'There was more in it,' the Chevalier said. Yes—there was much more in it.

The Testator, Samuel Norbery, gave the whole of his property, both real and personal, to George William Backler, Solicitor, and Joseph Mayes, Clerk to himself, upon Trust to pay his debts, his funeral and other expenses, and to accumulate the residue of his property until the end of the year 1887, or until his grand-niece, Althea Indagine, daughter of Clement Indagine, then resident at No. 12 New Thames Street, Bank Side, gentleman, should change her name either by marriage with some person whose surname was not and never had been Indagine, or by public announcement, and that if the said Althea Indagine should marry such a person within

the term aforesaid, the said Trustee should hold the whole of the Property in Trust for her absolutely.

But in case the said Althea Indagine should not contract such a marriage within the term aforesaid, the said Trustees were to become possessed of the said residue and accumulations upon Trust for Oliver, adopted son of Robert Luttrell, Physician, of 12 New Thames Street, Bank Side.

The whole of this magnificent property to be handled by himself, in Trust! and to think that six years had passed without his having any of that handling! All that property in Trust to manage!

Then Mr. Mayes arose hurriedly and dressed, and went downstairs before his clerk had opened the shutters, swept out the office, and taken in the milk.

When breakfast was served he appeared with an unusual smile and a most friendly nod and looked about him with a cheerfulness quite uncommon, for Mr. Mayes, like the

greater part of mankind, generally began the day grumpily. In his coat pocket was the will.

‘Bacon and eggs,’ he said. ‘You’ve a light hand with the frying-pan, Chevalier, I will say that of you. Take another egg. Here’s one browned beautiful. Well, nobleman, I’ve read the Will right through.’

‘You have read the Will right through,’ the Chevalier repeated gravely.

‘Yes, and a most wonderful thing it is. I don’t know what they will say to it at the Treasury. I’ll make a few inquiries first before we move; meantime, not a word, remember.’

‘Not a word,’ repeated the Chevalier, looking at him strangely.

‘As for that poor girl, I’m sure I’m delighted.’

‘You do remember signing the will, then?’

‘Memory plays strange tricks sometimes,’ Mr. Mayes replied with some confusion.

‘ But a good sleep sometimes sets all to rights. It’s the work that tells, you see ; when a man is tired, he doesn’t remember everything.’

‘ The work that tells ’—the Chevalier was very odd in his manner this morning.

‘ Nobleman,’—Mr. Mayes assumed his most benignant smile—‘ we’re old friends by this time, ain’t we? Certainly, says you. We know each other at last, don’t we? Why, to be sure we do, says you. I’ve been a considerate employer, haven’t I? None more so, says you, and a hasty word now and then doesn’t count, between pals. If you were a younger man and could run about a bit faster, you should be a partner, Chevalier, instead of a clerk. That is what you should be.’

The Chevalier bowed his head gravely.

‘ A lucky day it was for you when I picked you up, a very lucky day. You were in rags, I remember.’

The Chevalier held up the skirt of his coat and pointed to his cuffs.

‘ Well—you are rather ragged still, Cheva-

lier. But it's warm weather now. Before the cold sets in you shall have a new thick coat—rely upon that promise—if it is only a reward for finding this Will. I took you in out of the street.'

'You did.'

'I made you my clerk——'

'And your cook and messenger,' said the Chevalier.

'No one cooks so well as you, and no one handles a frying-pan or a griddle with more feeling. I always feel at meals, that it's a blessing for both of us to have well-cooked wholesome food—well—you've had light work—you can't deny that.'

'I do not deny it.'

'You've had the run of your teeth: enough to eat, haven't you?'

The Chevalier bowed gravely and spread out his hands.

'For your bedroom, you have a spacious, lofty and well-lighted apartment in the roof, commanding a splendid view of the rising

Surrey hills. In the daytime you enjoy the use of a noble reception room—it was the back office, in which they were sitting—‘replete, I am sure, with every comfort—it contained a table and two chairs, one a wooden arm-chair, the other without arms. ‘With every comfort,’ Mr. Mayes repeated. ‘And with all the latest improvements: you have a splendid kitchen with a beautiful range: you have the unrestricted use of a garden’—he looked out of the window upon the black patch with a single grimy laurel in it—‘small and compact and elegantly shrubbed. You have a refined home and a cheerful if limited circle: my society—mine: diet unlimited and drink in moderation. You would also have the use of a bath if the pipes were in order. And in return, such light work as has to be done. Don’t think, Chevalier, that I grumble at the cost. It is a Christian duty to entertain Foreign noblemen, as well as one’s fellow-creatures, especially when they are in rags and patriotic in their disposition. I do not

grudge it, I say, Chevalier, I'd do it again.'

'What do you ask me to do?'

'Well——' Mr. Mayes looked uneasy. 'First of all, say nothing. Do you know the girl?'

'I know her.'

'Tell her nothing,' he repeated.

'I shall tell her, for the moment, nothing. I have already promised. I wait to see what happens next.'

'And look here, Chevalier——' he shuffled his feet and his eyes fell. 'Memory is a very rum thing. It's the rummiest thing there is. You took me by surprise last night. I was thinking about something else. Perhaps a man may have a kind of softening and not know it. As for thinking it was thirty years ago and in the summer—when it was eight years ago, and in the winter. Ha! ha! that's a good joke—we'll have our laugh over that to ourselves, Chevalier, won't we? To ourselves; not with other people—we won't take

anybody else into that joke. I suppose—but I wouldn't say that outside—that I was a little drunk.'

'You were perfectly sober.'

'I must have been a little drunk—I had some gin-and-water before supper, and what with the beer at supper and the gin-and-water after supper——'

'You were perfectly sober,' the Chevalier repeated.

'Oh! very well—then—it comes to this, Chevalier, you must hold your tongue about it.'

'You remember now that you witnessed the will eight years ago.'

'Certainly. Quite well. Certainly. How could I ever have made such a——'

Then Mr. Mayes caught the Chevalier's eyes, and there was a look in them so queer, so strange, so monitory, that he left the sentence unfinished and returned to his bacon and eggs.

CHAPTER XV

THE GUARANTEE IS CUT OFF

SOME men carry good luck with them wherever they go—good luck to others if not to themselves. Others carry bad luck with them; they are accursed with the possession of the Evil Eye: those who become associated with them presently fall into some kind of trouble, even though the unfortunate cause—he who brought the ill luck in his pocket—may still continue to prosper mightily. It seemed, for instance, at first, that the young man from the ends of the earth had brought with him every kind of happiness; yet behold: In the house which had sheltered him there was one girl who wept when she was alone and hung her head when she was in the family circle. And in the other house which had

given him hospitality, there was a man whom he left restless and discontented, and a girl whom he had taken out of monotony and stagnant calm and filled with new thoughts. Now the putting of new thoughts into a resident of that house was like the turning of a rushing mountain stream into a still, placid mountain tarn. Before Laurence came to these distant shores from far Australia, the inhabitants were even as those peaceful, tranquil, contented Caribs before Columbus touched the shores of Hispaniola. The Caribs knew few arts and desired to know no more. They lived and loved after the manner of their ancestors ; some of them, perhaps, even ate up each other, following the same time-honoured example. On Bank Side, Oliver, contented with his salary of three pounds a week, courted Cassie, and was gradually forgetting the abominable principles he had learned in Germany : he lived the simple life and thought of science day and night. Althea's boat lay riding on the flood while that river nymph

saw troops of ghosts walking upon the banks and gliding in splendid barges up and down the river. The Poet was preparing for posterity the Complete Edition of his Poems ; in a work designed for posterity no one is ever in a hurry : it may extend for a thousand years and one would not grow tired of it. Now—now—as in those lovely Caribbean Isles after the advent of the white-winged ships, all, all was changed. The old contentment was gone : and he who could have set things right was also gone, no one knew where. More misfortune—much more misfortune—was to follow.

Take the unhappy case of Lucius himself.

Up to forty years of age the career of this legal functionary was one of great success and well-merited honour. He bore his success and his honours with becoming dignity. At the age of fifteen, when he left the paternal Academy, he entered as a junior—nothing but a junior—a boy clerk in Chambers, being in the service of half a dozen gentlemen,

for the most part newly called to the Bar. When the others drifted apart, Lucius attached himself—at a small Guarantee—to one who presently began to attract the attention of solicitors and rose rapidly into practice and to that kind of income which so much glorifies and illustrates the dignity of the Bar. In due course, Mr. Polter assumed silk; he became Polter Q.C. The Guarantee then touched the respectable figure of 200*l.*, in addition to which there were the clerk's fees, so that Lucius was in the receipt of an income far beyond anything he had ever expected, and stood among the most envied of his brethren who assist upon the Higher Branch.

The Barrister's Clerk occupies a unique position in Clerkdom. His income, not his Guarantee or fixed salary, rises and falls with that of his master. There is thus established a kind of partnership; or rather, there is the relationship of client and patron. If the patron or the lawyer has a bad time, it is shared by the client or clerk. When the

patron is successful, the client, like the Pope, leads a happy life. But, as in every other earthly career, there are many who fail in this blessedness of a patron's success and never rise above the Guarantee. And, as in all other professions, there are many kinds of men who follow it. There is the dignified clerk, for instance, such as Lucius Cottle, whose manners are founded on those of the Bench, rather than the Bar. There is the convivial clerk who drinketh with other clerks, even with those of the Lower Branch, and hath no pride in his calling, and may be seen in billiard rooms and music halls. There is again the clerk who brings business : he presents an affable and cheerful countenance ; he has a warm grasp and a sunny smile, and he has a cold heart ; in these days, it is such a clerk as is most desired.

There was no more dignified clerk in the Four Inns of Court than Mr. Cottle : nor was there one who was more respected in both branches. Polter Q.C. was envied for the

possession of this Prince, Paragon, or Phœnix of Clerks. He was supposed to cause the flow of business as the moon causeth the flow of tides. No clerk ever received a brief with a finer air: he conferred a favour by taking it: he did not display gratitude; his was the obliging party, not the obliged.

‘We are very busy just now,’ he would say, lifting a brow preoccupied with the cares of work. ‘But you may leave it with me; we will do what we can for you.’ Nor did any clerk rate his master’s services at a more princely value.

Polter would have been made a judge: everybody said that he was certain to be made a judge: in that case one of the snug little berths of which there are so many in the Courts of Law would have been found for Lucius. Alas! The Lady Atropos—let us speak of her with awe—cut a certain thread with her scissors and Polter Q.C. had to retire from chambers, club, Cumberland Terrace, and his wide circle of friends and

the world. He gave up practice and fell asleep in Kensal Green. Never did a greater misfortune befall any Barrister's Clerk. That was five years before this history begins, when Lucius was forty years of age.

Everyone, at first, said that the man would be fortunate who should secure Polter's clerk. But then every man in good practice had his own clerk already. Therefore, Lucius had to look among the rising men. He attached himself to one who had all the ambition requisite for the receipt of the most enormous income, but lacked the power of convincing solicitors that it would be to their advantage to give him that income. This aspirant thought that business would follow in the train of Polter's clerk, and retained him, at first, on the old Guarantee.

The result was not quite what was expected. For though some of the clerk's old friends stood by him, the new master was not a Polter.

Then the Guarantee was reduced.

A second and a third time it was reduced.

It now stood at the figure—ridiculous when one considers the ability of the recipient—of . . . but no, 'twere indelicate to set it down.

Five years passed. The learned Counsel, who had once seemed one of the coming men, rose no higher. His chance was gone: he would never get any higher endorsement of the few briefs which came in: dignity was lost upon such a master. The chambers were shared by three or four young gentlemen, who talked, smoked cigarettes, read French novels, sat on tables, and told each other stories—and of what flippancy!—and had no feeling, either for the dignity of a clerk or the gravity of their profession. One of them spent his whole time in writing for the magazines: he was known to have written a novel, for the production of which he had paid a large sum, and he was said to have succeeded in getting a farce accepted at the

Melpomene Theatre—a farce—and a novel—oh! dread shade of Polter!

The last blow fell; the Guarantee was cut off: Lucius was informed that his services, in the depressed condition of business, could all be performed by a boy. He could, therefore, take a month's notice or a month's pay. The blow was not unexpected, yet, when it fell, it was like the stroke of a hammer on the temple, for it stunned this clerk and for a whole morning left him speechless. The vivacious young gentlemen told their stories within hearing, but he heard them not. He sat at his desk, but though there was no work to do he held pen in hand and thought that he was driving it.

At the same moment another disaster fell upon the unfortunate family. Misfortunes are gregarious, as is well known: they love not solitary ways; they will still be moving, if they can, in troops.

We must not blame the Manager of the St. Paul's Cathedral branch. He is responsible

for the conduct of the business: if things go wrong it is he who is blamed: he is not, again, the Proprietor: if he were, he could afford sometimes to pass over, to pardon, to accept excuses, to give time, to be moved with compassion. A manager cannot permit himself any of these pleasures.

It was Cassie's duty to receive visitors, to point out to them the various styles in which grace and comeliness such as theirs may be represented by the sun: to take their guineas and to show them such civility as would give this *atelier* a good name. As she was an obliging girl of pleasing address, and appearance to correspond, she had hitherto given satisfaction to the Manager. Alas! since her trouble began, all this was changed. Her smiles vanished: her manner was short, her appearance sad; and as day followed day, there was no change in these signs of trouble and distress.

'See now, young lady,' said the Manager. 'Things can't go on this way, you know.'

‘What way?’ asked Cassie, perfectly well understanding.

‘What’s come over you? What’s the matter with you?’

‘Nothing,’ said the girl.

‘That’s nonsense, and you know it. Where’s your cheerfulness? where’s your old smile, and your good looks? Well—it’s no concern of mine what the trouble may be, but don’t you see that we can’t go on?’

‘I do my work,’ she replied.

‘Yes, you receive the people as if you wanted to cry over them. Hang it! People won’t be cried over: you might just as well pray for ’em. And then they go away and say the girl looks so miserable that she must be ill-treated—who ill-treats you in this house, I should like to know?’

‘Nobody.’

‘Nobody, of course not. But we get all the credit of it. Why, you are actually bringing a bad name on the place. We can’t go on, you know, we really can’t.’

‘What do you want me to do?’

‘Get back your cheerful looks, my girl, that’s what I want you to do. If you can do that I’ve no complaint to make. If you can’t, why then, you see, we must consider our position.’

In a week’s time, Cassie remaining contumacious in melancholy, the Manager did consider the position. Now when a business man considers a position, he is not like a military man engaged in the same occupation. He is not going to defend or to storm that position. He is going to put an end to it. The position therefore vanished. Cassie received a week’s notice. Alas for the persecution of Fate! It was on the same day that the Guarantee was withdrawn.

Mr. Cottle came home that evening with an air of increased dignity. He at first said nothing, but took his arm-chair, and sat bolt upright without book or newspaper, his thin legs crossed, his hands upon the arms of the chair, his head erect, as one who awaits buffets of fortune.

It was an attitude for a gentleman in time of trouble undeserved. Flavia, the most sympathetic of the three as regards her father, was the first to perceive that something had happened—of course, something bad; but she said nothing. Presently Cornelia, from her chair, became also aware that something had happened. The uneasiness of anticipation is as catching as mumps. Sempronius perceived that something was in the air; he, too, was arrived at that stage of experience when things unusual are expected to be things unpleasant.

Cassie suffering on her own account regarded not her parent. Besides she was looking out of the window. She saw and felt nothing but her own sadness.

The Master of the house, not unconscious of awakened curiosity, sat in silence: from time to time a smile passed over his face, as of one who endures, or a gentle nod, as of one who accepts: but he would not too quickly satisfy curiosity. His own admirable

behaviour under misfortune pleased and consoled him. Does it not always console the sufferer when he can feel that he has done or said the right thing? Consider the frequent funerals of the Mile End Road, where they still know how to do justice to a funeral. As the men in black walk stately before and beside the bier, you may look into the carriages and mark how the grief of the bereaved is visibly consoled by the admiration of the people on the pavement. They sit upright with conscious pride: the women bridle and smile: the men nudge each other. A family which can do things in such a style is indeed one which confers honour on its members.

When Lucius presently arose and sought the book with which he illustrated every difficulty in the conduct of life—I mean his father's work, which was his guide in doubt and his fount of consolation in trouble—Flavia understood that the position was serious indeed.

He opened the book and laid it before him. Then he turned over the pages and cleared his throat as one who is about to commence Family Prayers. He then read aloud, with intervals for meditation, detached maxims or sentences as he found them in the volume. The effect was as saddening as the ringing of a knell or the firing of minute guns at sea.

“When Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar could not console the afflicted Patriarch, the Hand which had laid the suffering upon him was pleased graciously to remove them. With this example before him, the wise man waits.”

‘Children,’ said the expositor, ‘the wise man waits.’

Flavia was unable to withhold a murmur of admiration. Never was such a man as father for behaving in the right way. Other sufferers waltz around and let themselves rip: he on the other hand—but what had happened to him?

The reader went on :—

“ Belisarius, blind and old, extends his hand and begs an obolus. Cræsus is laid upon the pyre to be burned alive. Dionysius teaches a school. These are the commonest illustrations of Fickle Fortune. We need not go to history for examples of her inconstancy, because every workhouse presents us with many proofs. Let us read in the Book of Life, which lies open to all of us, lessons that may keep us sober in times of fatness, and resigned in times of dearth. Should the worst happen to us we have at hand instances parallel with our own case or even worse.” These, children, are the words of your grandfather. The wise man is resigned in times of dearth, that is, I take it, not dearness, because I have always found things dear, all my life—but, in times of scarcity, when not only luxuries have to be abandoned, but necessities have to be straitened.’

At this point Sempronius, who was sitting behind his father, clapped his hands to his

ears so as not to hear these signals of distress. Besides he had a most wonderful book to read : it was about an heroic boy with Nelson. And Cassie about this time became conscious of something unusual and turned her head. And Cornelia coughed quietly. The action is with some an indication of satisfaction or of pride which must manifest itself in some way. In the Church one cannot clap hands, stamp with the feet, or cry encore. Therefore one coughs quietly. Well-mannered ladies in a certain rank of life seldom mark their approval in any other way.

Her brother turned two or three pages more, and in the voice of a clergyman at a funeral began again :—

‘The wants of the body are few. The chances of Fortune cannot touch the soul. He who——’

‘Father!’ cried Flavia, springing to her feet, ‘what in the world has happened?’

Her father closed the book, laid his left hand upon it, and thrust the right hand into

his bosom. Then he rose and stood upon the hearth and looked round him.

‘Children,’ he said, ‘and Sister Cornelia, I have this day received intimation that the Guarantee is withdrawn.’

‘Lucius,’ cried his sister, ‘you don’t mean to say that you are out of place?’

‘We don’t call it “place,” Sister, in the Higher Branch. The Guarantee, I said, has been withdrawn—the Guarantee.’

‘Well, father,’ said Flavia, ‘but such as you can easily find another—Guarantee. You have only to lift your little finger. Why, I have often wondered at your staying so long where there was so little for you.’

‘I hope I may find another Guarantee. At the same time I do not disguise from myself that business is bad and such an official as myself, with thirty years of experience, may not immediately command the price which he not unnaturally puts upon his own services. I have received a month’s notice with option of a month’s pay; this I have taken, because

I shall then have leisure to look around. Meantime, my children, until something else is found there is no income and only the month's pay in hand.'

'Well, I've got twenty-five shillings a week,' said Flavia, 'and there's Aunt, and Cassie has got eighteen shillings. We shan't starve for a bit.'

'Oh!' said Cassie, 'I was going to tell you. It is a terrible misfortune—I didn't know how dreadful it was going to be, I've had a week's notice too.'

'You, Cassie,' cried Flavia, 'why I thought—what have you done now?'

'The Manager wants more cheerfulness. He says he won't have people cried over.'

'Oh!' said Flavia, 'this is terrible.'

'I dare say I shall find another place,' said Cassie. 'Anything will do—what does it matter? Perhaps they will take me on at an undertaker's.'

'Oh! what shall we do?' cried Flavia in

despair. 'This misfortune on the top of the other.'

'My children, we have need of all the fortifications of philosophy.' Lucius stepped to the table again and opened his book.

'The other night,' said Cornelia—'last night it was—no—the day before yesterday towards the morning, I dreamed of rainbows. I might have known they meant a change of fortune.'

'Well, aunt,' said Flavia, 'if you must dream, you had better dream a way out of it, I think.' She stepped over to her sister and laid her arm round her. 'Cassie, dear,' she said, 'must you go? Won't they keep you on if you come to look happy again? Try, dear—consider—how are we to live? Can't you smile and laugh and joke with them as you used to do?'

'Look happy, Flavia?' The girl turned her wan and sorrow-stricken face. 'Look happy? I? Don't mind me, dear, there must be some place where they want a miserable girl.'

‘Oh ! I could kill him—I wish I could kill him,’ Flavia whispered.

Her father had found another passage and read it—his words falling again upon their hearts like the tolling of that dismal bell of death.

‘Virtue makes the mind invincible. It places us beyond the power of Fortune, though not beyond the malice which that Goddess sometimes seems to show. When Zeno was told that all his goods were drowned—“Why then,” said he, “I perceive that Fortune hath a mind to make me a philosopher.” My children, I am much in the position of Zeno : let me, too, become a philosopher—I will be no longer Lucius but Zeno.’

CHAPTER XVI

‘WHEN LOVE WITH UNCONFINÉD WINGS’

THE afternoon was as hot as, in August, afternoons can be. In New Thames Street the air was like that of the innermost chamber in the Turkish Bath, where he who dares to sit may have his egg boiled in his hand, and place his toast to be roasted beside him on the seat. It was like the air of a baker's oven. Every brick was a fire brick in a red-hot stove: every stone in the pavement struck out heat in invisible flames that scorched the hands and face. The face of the river trembled with the heat: no boat could live upon it: far away up stream where house-boats are moored, those who were in them pulled down the blinds to shut out the blinding glare of the

great heat and lay panting in the shade : those in town wished themselves by the seaside, the breeze fresh and cool fanning their cheeks : those at the seaside sprawled in the shadow of the rocks and longed to be under some tree in a shady wood : those in the woods longed for the cool bank of a trout-stream on the hillside : those who might have sat upon such a bank stayed indoors : the working man longed for the long cool draught from the pewter in the bar : the city clerk in vain hope of a cool retreat tried the handles of the church doors.

It was perhaps the heat of the day which made Althea restless : it was perhaps the close air of the street which made her cheek pale and drew such a dark ring round her eyes and spread a cloud upon her forehead. She was disquieted : her soul was troubled with unrest and discontent. We who wag grey beards forget this disease of youth—the malady of restlessness, the sickness of yearning after the unknown, the oppression and pain of dis-

content. Althea was like the child who cries because it wants something but knows not what. She sat at her piano and played a little, letting her fingers wander over the keys. The music brought her no tranquillity. Then she exchanged the music-stool for a chair and took up some work. If needlework cannot steady a woman's nerves, nothing can. Watch a woman when, in a state of nervous agitation, she sits down and takes her work, because she can say and do no more. She snatches the stuff: while her lips move with the words which she does not utter, while her cheeks burn and her eyes flash, the needle flies: the sharp tick as it leaves the stuff is like the beat of a quickened pulse: see—she is still in the paroxysm of her rage, her jealousy, her fears—faster—faster flies the needle. Presently it begins to move more slowly: the medicine works: the nerves are beginning to quiet down: little by little the needle resumes its customary pace; the woman smooths the work upon her knee, and wonders at the

progress that she has made, forgetting the swiftness with which that little sympathetic instrument responded to her emotion. Now her eyes are steady, her lips are quiet: she lets the work lie idly in her lap: she sits upright, looks round and heaves a sigh. Should her lover or her husband find her now, she will greet him with forgiveness in her face and a kiss upon her lips.

But the needle failed to cure Althea's restlessness. She threw away the work and went to her bookshelves, which were mostly filled with poetry. As becomes a grandchild of the Muse, Althea read a great deal of poetry. She stood awhile trying to remember something that would suit her mood. Books there are with medicine for every mood except one. When the patient suffers from the restlessness of youth, no poet has ever yet been found who can suit that mood or cure that disorder. She took down volume after volume, turned over the leaves awhile, and put it back again. Presently some lines caught her eye—

I dare say she had read them a hundred times before, but now they seemed to have new force and a new meaning. They were the lines beginning :—

‘When Love with unconfinéd wings
Hovers within my gates :
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the grates :
When I lye tangled in her haire
And fettered to her eye,
The birds that wanton in the aire
Know no such liberty.’

The sweet extravagance of the verse : the worship of her own name : the foolishness of any man desiring to lie tangled in a woman's hair : the audacity of comparing his soul, free to love, with the ‘enlarged winds that curl the flood :’ his contentment—oh, fond young man !—with the freedom of love : struck some chord in her own heart. She read the poem a second and a third time, and sighed as she put the book back in its place. No woman really desires to have her hair tangled about her lover—the thing would actually in itself give her no satisfaction at all : but that he

should desire it—that he should find a mysterious and wonderful happiness in a thing so foolish—that he should desire to be fettered to his sweetheart's eye—that he should tremble in her presence, and rejoice only to touch her hand—this is the sweetness and the beauty of love. Therefore, perhaps as one who recognises sweetness and beauty in the abstract, without reference to herself, Althea sighed when she laid down the poet.

It was another poet whom she opened next. This girl read poetry as others read novels. It was the good old fashion until sixty or seventy years ago. Then, no one could ever explain why, poetry came down with a crash and has never, financially or fashionably speaking, got up again. It went out of the daily life. Poets nowadays have to sing for very small pay. Novels fell, too, with poetry : they lay confounded in one common ruin. But novels got up again. Needs must that we exchange our own lives and troubles, sometimes, for other lives and

troubles. Novels arose, learned lessons from the past, reformed, and prospered again. Some time, perhaps, they may fall again, if ever they grow so dull and so conventional as those of the twenties: temporary eclipse from this cause is always possible. Or, if the daily life, the common lot, is filled with new interests: if dull lives are brightened by new excitements and more frequent pleasures, the novel will perhaps no longer be wanted. But that day is distant.

The book which Althea took down next was the first volume of Tennyson. She read *'Mariana in the South.'* It might almost have been written for Mariana on Bank Side. Why not? Shall the Borough contain no romance? Is not the Bank of silver Thames as fit for love and poetry as the parched and arid County of Provence?

‘Ah!’ she sung, ‘to be all alone:
To live forgotten and die forlorn!’

She sighed again when she put down the book. She looked about her: instead of the

high white wall, the green lattice, the dusty vines, the white road, the broad gravel and shallow stretch of the river-bed, the dazzling light, the bare dry hills, the grey olive that never was young, the parched earth of the fields, the mulberry trees stripped of their leaves, on which Mariana looked, she saw the open window, the hot and narrow street, and heard the bustle of the Bank, where the men ran up and down the planks with their barrows and the steamers panted along what they call the Silent Highway.

‘ Sometimes in the falling day,
An image seemed to pass the door.’

She looked up involuntarily as if to catch a fleeting glimpse of that image, or to hear a footstep at the door. But she saw no image and heard no footstep. That is, there were, outside, the customary sounds with the sledgehammer of the Boiler Works, banging as vigorously as a cabman swings his arms in cold weather ; but the only footstep she heard was that of her father in his study.

The poet, too, was restless: he tossed his long locks behind him: he walked about his room: he fidgeted among his books and with his papers.

But he knew exactly—which Althea did not—what made him restless. He wanted Laurence back. He wanted more praise; to a poet, praise is like sunshine: to all of us it does good unless, which rarely happens, we get too much: but a Poet needs it, as much as he needs food for the body.

He drew from an envelope the famous article of the *'Saturday Review'*; it was now falling to pieces by being constantly opened and read: he knew it by heart: yet he read it again and again. There was one line in it which seemed to give only qualified praise. This passage gave him so much pain that he had acquired the habit of leaving it out: he skipped it: his eye refused to see it. But the rest—the rest, indeed, was beautiful, true, and yet so strictly just. When he had read it

through he folded it and replaced it carefully in the envelope.

Then his restlessness, soothed for the moment, fell upon him again. His table was covered with his own manuscript poems. Since the arrival of this wonderful young man—like a young man in a fairy story—who had come all the way from Australia solely in order to gaze upon him, he had been continually examining and polishing this precious collection. He was going to publish them, some time, when the polishing process was complete. How much immortal verse is withheld from the world because the poet is never satisfied to let it leave his hands! While he is still correcting and polishing—click! he hears the fatal scissors. Then he drops his papers, and presently unsympathetic executors consign them to the waste-paper basket.

Of late years, the poet had written little. Shut up in his little corner of London, removed from the sources of inspiration—for if an artist neither studies man nor nature

—if he converse not with gracious lady or simple shepherdess—if he shuts his eyes to the Heavens and the round world and all that therein is, he must surely dry up. Genius must be fed ; therefore, Clement Indagine had of late written little : and that little, he could not but own to himself—few poets are so truthful—was but a pale reflection, a thin replica, of what he had written before.

Althea found him wandering as restless as herself among his volumes.

‘My dear,’ he cried, ‘if you had not come to me I must have gone to you.’

‘What is it, dear?’

‘I don’t know. I—I—I want something, Althea.’ He said this quite simply and like a child. He wanted something. He sat down and leaned his head upon his hands.

‘My dear, I cannot sleep at night. In the morning I am lonely. All day I feel like a prisoner—I have been here thirty years and I have never felt like this before.’

‘Perhaps the time has come for you to go back to the world.’

‘Yes—yes, that must be it. Mr. Waller said he would take me—why does he not come back? Where is he, Althea?’

‘Indeed, I do not know.’

‘I thought he had brought me happiness, but he has not. He has brought me nothing but discontent——’

‘Oh! father, not happiness to feel that the people love your verses and repeat them and quote them?’

‘I want to hear them repeat the verses—I want to see with my own eyes.’

‘Then, dear, let us go back to the world together.’

‘You and I together? Why, my dear, the world is for men. You could not sit in the tavern drinking with us. I must go alone—or with Mr. Waller. My dear, the world is not for girls. It is a rude, rough place. They hooted me out of it. Can I tell how they will receive me again?’

‘Why,—as if there could be any doubt. Have no fear about that.’

‘Oh! It is Mr. Waller that I want. Where is he? Why has he gone away?’ He began to pace the room impatiently. ‘It is not right for him to leave me so suddenly. Why, if he were to come back and to take me into the world, all would be well. Without him—Is it possible, Althea,’ he exclaimed in agitation, ‘that a few weeks should make such a difference? Six weeks ago I had never seen him: now I miss him every hour of the day. Never was there such a bright and cheerful lad: he laughed and made us laugh: why, had you ever heard me laugh before? Poor child, it grieves me now to think that there was no laughter in the house until this young Australian brought it. Even Oliver never laughed. And then he was full of sympathy—and he knew how to be respectful in the presence of genius: he ought not to have gone, I say—he ought not—why did he go?’

‘ I do not know. I only know that he is gone. It was a wonderful change that he brought to us. Now that he has gone it is difficult to settle back to the old tranquillity. But we must remember that after all he was a stranger to us—we were nothing to him : at home he lives in a great house : why should we expect him to continue in this humble place ? ’

‘ Because, my dear,’ said the poet with confidence, ‘ he took the greatest possible pleasure in my society. That is, I should say, quite sufficient reason. Poets do not live everywhere. In order to enjoy my conversation, he came here, as you know, nearly every evening : in order to please me and to win some mark of my gratitude, he was good enough to show you, my dear, such attentions as a young man can pay to a young lady : he rowed with you, walked with you, and talked with you. Well, it was kind of him. I thoroughly appreciate his motives. I saw through his thin pretences—to others it might have

seemed a desire for your society—I, for my part, know better. Well, he has earned my gratitude: he has won my friendship: he has his reward.'

'Yes, dear.' Althea did not dispute this proposition. 'But he had business of some kind to do here, and when that was done he had to go. Could we expect him to stay on just to please us?'

'Nay—nay—but to please himself, child—to please himself. You, who have always lived with a poet, do not quite understand how the poetic temperament may strike the imagination of a young man. To please himself.'

'Perhaps he will come again. He has promised to see us again before he goes home.'

'Then look at the way of it,' her father continued, grumbling. 'He never told us he was going—he just walked out of the house without a word. It was on that evening when you became engaged to Oliver.'

'Father,' said Althea quickly. 'Please

understand clearly—I am not engaged to Oliver. I told you at the time—it was only a condition—if I could bring myself to care for him——’

‘But, my dear—we thought—your uncle thinks—we all hoped and believed that this was a figure of speech. We were quite satisfied with the condition. Of course a girl cannot be expected to fall into her lover’s arms.’

‘It is impossible—I thought so then—now I know that it is impossible. Even if he cared for me it would be impossible, father’—she became suddenly resolute in so much that her father was instantly convinced. ‘Never—never—never—would I marry Oliver. The thought of such a thing is horrible.’

‘My dear child:’ he took her hand astonished at her vehemence; ‘my dear, you shall not, unless you please. Let us talk no more about it.’ At another time he would have said a good deal, but for the moment he was full of his own sorrows. The best

remedy against grieving over others' troubles is to have plenty of your own.

'You were talking of Mr. Waller,' said Althea.

'Yes. And I must say, my dear, that I cannot possibly understand his conduct. What makes it the more remarkable is that he had been invited to congratulate us—to share our family joy. So great was the confidence we reposed in him.'

'To congratulate you?'

'Why, my dear,' her father replied in some confusion, 'we naturally thought—we believed—we hoped, that you were going to make us all happy by accepting Oliver. And your uncle told Mr. Waller in the morning what was going on.'

'Told Mr. Waller? Oh! How could he talk about me in that way?'

'Your uncle was struck—doctors notice things, you know—with a kind of melancholy which seemed to fall suddenly upon the young man. I think something must have happened.

He became gloomy and answered in monosyllables. I expected him to call in the afternoon—I had in fact a poem to submit to him. It was one in my Middie style. But he did not come. I wished now that your uncle had pressed him to explain the cause of his gloom.'

'Mr. Waller knew that Oliver——' Althea began with burning cheeks.

'Certainly, my dear. And he was invited to join in congratulations: he came as he had promised: we were all silent and rather anxious, I remember, because, my dear, your future was at stake, and that was cause enough for anxiety—but I could not help observing the young man's changed appearance. He looked haggard—actually white and haggard. He stood at the window and hardly spoke. Something must have happened to him. Perhaps he was ill. However, our thoughts were with Oliver and you——'

'Never mind about Oliver,' said the girl.

‘Well—when Oliver threw open the door and told us what had happened—I mean, what he thought had been promised—Mr. Waller without a single word rushed out of the house. Did you not see him? He rushed. He said not one single word—he rushed out of the house. And next day we hear that he is gone. Did you not see him?’

‘No, I did not know,’ she replied, but in a voice so strange and constrained that her father was startled.

‘Why, my dear,’ he laid his hand upon hers—‘what is the matter?’

‘Nothing—nothing—what should there be?’ But her looks belied her words. For her cheek was pale and her eyes were dilated as those of one startled by a revelation. Indeed a revelation had come unto her—the sudden perception of so great a thing that it caused these outward signs of inward tumult. A revelation—nothing less. One that would henceforth change all her life and give new colour to the world around her. In her ears,

as if to accompany the revelation, were ringing in a voice which she knew and remembered—certain words which she had read an hour ago.

‘When Love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates :
And my divine Althea brings—’

‘What is it, dear?’ asked her father. ‘Why do you look so frightened? What have I said? Believe me, dear, Oliver shall not——’

‘Oh, never speak of Oliver again—never again,’ she repeated, shuddering. ‘I cannot bear to hear his name. No—no——’ she looked round as if terrified, ‘nothing is the matter—nothing.—It is the hot day and I am restless, and oh ! I am so lonely and so friendless—so friendless’—she burst into sobs and tears.

Now this elderly divine Maker had been all his life writing of Love, in praise and worship of Love. Of Love the unconquered, Love the Dominator. Of woman’s affection

and of man's passion he had been making rhymes for forty years and more. But it was Love conventional, Love unreal, that he described. Truth to tell, though his words might be as fiery as those of the eighteenth century bards who burned and swooned and flamed in rapture and died in ecstasy, his verse could have moved no one. Also, being a man whose thoughts were chiefly occupied with himself, he never observed the plain and common symptoms of love. You have seen in what a spirit he interpreted the young man's attentions to his daughter. Flavia, who had never written any verses—she had indeed never read any except in a hymn-book—understood these symptoms very well. But the Poet, the Maker of a hundred love-poems, could not discover these symptoms even when they were exhibited under his own Parnassian roof, within an inch of his poetic nose.

‘Yes, dear,’ he said. ‘Hush, do not cry, Althea, my dear, we are lonely and friendless’—the tears stood in his eyes as well. ‘We

are poor and lonely and friendless. We had one friend and he is gone. Hush, my dear, you tear my heart. We are unhappy, we will go away—somewhere—if there is any money—we will try to forget our friend who brought us joy and left us sorrow. Hush, my dear—my dear.'

He soothed and consoled her in his ignorance. But she left him and went upstairs to her own chamber.

For now she knew. Suddenly the thing that other girls would have known from the very outset, she guessed at last. Other girls talk with each other of love; they hear of engagements and live in that great human family where there is continual marrying and giving in marriage. Althea read of love, but it was of an abstract thing: she did not connect it with herself. But now she knew that he loved her—he loved her. Oh! she felt his love encompassing her, as with a garment, and that made of crimson velvet set with

pearls embroidered with gold and fringed with lace. She shivered, but not with cold, while her lover hung this robe upon her: she blushed beneath the longing of his eyes: the touch of his hands made her tremble: the sound of his voice filled her heart with joy. He loved her.

She knew now—yes, she knew at last—why she was so restless and so unhappy. Like her father she longed for the return of this young man—because he loved her.

She fled to her chamber. Love himself, who does not always show roguish eyes, stood at the gates with sympathetic face: with one hand he shut and barred the door; and then armed with a sword, he stood without, an out guard or tyler, to slay any who should dare to pry into the secret, sacred mystery of a maiden's heart.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MOTOR PATH

MR. MAYES remained in a condition of the strangest bewilderment. Day and night he was tortured with this failure of memory. Never before had he experienced anything like this wonderful forgetfulness. The solid earth sank beneath his steps: the world was going round him: he felt like losing his wits.

He remembered hard: he set himself to remember with all his soul and all his strength: he looked up the office books of the time for anything that might help him to remember: yet he could not recall the witnessing of that will. That it should be anything but a genuine instrument never entered his head: how could anybody write his signa-

ture so that he himself would not know it except for his own? The longer he remembered, the less did he succeed.

Then a truly dreadful thought came into his head and would not be dislodged. It has been hinted that Mr. Backler, deceased, suffered in his latter years some loss of the finer faculties. Elderly gentlemen who take ardent drinks from eleven in the morning till eleven at night often do experience this loss. Mr. Backler, in fact, had softening of the brain: and presented before his death a very mournful spectacle indeed. Now Mr. Mayes could not conceal from himself the fact that he too only sought his bed at night when he could hold no more.

The terror that he was going in the same way became at last intolerable: he could bear it no longer. He was fain to lay his case before a doctor.

The practitioner in whom he confided was a young man newly started in practice, an intelligent person from the London Hospital,

who not only possessed enough medical knowledge to pass his examination but also had some tincture of modern science.

‘You are suffering,’ he said after many questions, the use of the stethoscope, and the examination of the pulse, ‘from one of those obscure forms of brain disease which have recently been the subject of special investigation.’

‘I thought so,’ Mr. Mayes groaned. ‘Like Mr. Backler’s case.’

‘You are lucky,’ continued the medical man, ‘that science has tackled your disorder.’

‘Should I have been a goner?’ asked Mr. Mayes, pallid.

‘Most certainly you would. Aphasia takes many forms: it is due to many causes: perhaps you have taken too many stimulants: or you have been worked too hard: or you have taken too little exercise. Some men lose the power of speech altogether: others can only say half of what they wish to say: some forget certain things and remember others.’

‘That’s me,’ said Mr. Mayes.

‘You remember, I believe, everything of importance except one particular event.’

‘The most important thing, pretty well, of any. And I can’t remember—try all I know—one single word of it.’

‘Exactly.’ The young practitioner laughed and rubbed his hands as if this was a branch of business which he really did like. ‘Your case grows clearer. Now, Sir, by the aid of a little diagram you will understand exactly what is the matter with you.’

He took paper and pencil and drew a little black circle.

‘That’s the centre. These lines’—he drew two straight lines radiating from the centre—‘represent respectively the sensory path—this with an arrow towards the circle: and the motor path—this one with the arrow from the circle. Your memory carries the events of the past towards the centre by the sensory path: and they start out again by the motor path. You understand? Very well then. In your case there is a breakdown somewhere about

here'—he indicated the probable spot by a black dot. 'The breakdown in fact has caused temporary central paralysis.'

Mr. Mayes groaned. Already he felt himself like Mr. Backler, incapable of speech or thought.

'Fortunately, as I have said, science has conquered the brain. You may therefore get cured. But there is only one man for your case—of course I mean Sir Wigmore Wimpole of Grosvenor Street. You must go to him without delay. I will make an appointment and go with you.'

'Will it—will it—cost much?'

'A good deal I should say,' replied the young man carelessly. 'A man is generally willing to pay in order to save himself from a madhouse or a grave.'—Mr. Mayes groaned. 'But don't be frightened, you can afford it.'

'What will they do to me?'

'You will perhaps be put through a course of the electric battery.'

It sounded terrifying. The patient groaned. But he thought again of Mr. Backler and how

that poor sufferer had to give up everything and didn't know what he babbled, and he made up his mind that he would, if possible, avoid that fate.

He went to the great specialist and laid this case before him. It was a curious and interesting case—even unique. Here was a man who had forgotten one thing—only one thing. Why, we forget thousands of things daily; but we do not forget events which at the time are recognised as truly important: we do not forget the signing of a will disposing of an enormous property: it was the interesting feature of the case that the patient had forgotten a thing which in the ordinary course he would never have forgotten.

Nobody doubted this cardinal point. Therefore they resolved to treat the patient for partial central paralysis. First they cut off all his drink—yea, his beer, his whiskey, rum and gin—as for the juice of the grape Mr. Mayes had never gazed upon the cup when it is red. They made him walk swiftly

for an hour before breakfast, an hour before dinner, and another before tea : they put him on diet : in mockery they allowed him his pipe—as if a pipe can be taken without a glass ! And every day three times for four minutes each time, they treated him to electricity. It was horrible. They put one pole at the nape of his neck, and the other at the base of the tongue with the intention of loosening the glosso-pharyngeal nerve. The indignity of this treatment Mr. Mayes bore with greater philosophy than the fearful cost of it, which amounted to six guineas a day. As for carrying on business that was next to impossible, because, as all patients use, he continually exercised himself in finding out by trying to remember if he was getting any better.

He was not : after ten days of the treatment he was much thinner, paler of cheek, much more hungry and extremely choleric. But he still remembered nothing of the will. He could stand it no longer.—He then arose and solemnly

cursed to his face Sir Wigmore Wimpole, M.D., F.R.S., that great and illustrious Physician, and the whole College of Physicians, and even that sweet and beauteous maid Science herself: he attributed to the great specialist the most sordid motives and he left the place. He was no better: the motor path continued to be obstructed, and Mr. Mayes, though he returned to his old habits, fell into a gentle melancholy, expecting the fate of Mr. Backler and a softening.

He thought of the will and of the heiress—a girl named Althea, daughter of Clement Indagine. Why, he knew the man by sight. He lived with a doctor close to Bankside: he was a shabby-looking man who wore a broad felt hat and a brown velvet coat and had white locks: that was Clement Indagine. He was brother to that Æneas Indagine, junior clerk at Backler's, who ran away about thirty years ago; they turned out to be nephews of the old man, and nobody ever knew it: and their uncle clapped their father into the Queen's Bench for

debt, and let him die there—his own brother-in-law. A hard man, Mr. Norbery : but money must be looked after.

‘Chevalier,’ he said, ‘I’ve been thinking—about that will, of course.’

‘Yes.’

‘I must do something : I must give it to a lawyer.’

‘You remember signing the will?’

‘Why, of course.’ The Chevalier looked up from under his thick white eyebrows and Mr. Mayes changed colour and stammered, ‘Of course. Didn’t I tell you that I remember all about it? What have you got to say to that, eh?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Very well then. Why the devil shouldn’t I remember? Now, then—I’ve got to do something—the business can’t wait about much longer. There will be a row at the Treasury, I suppose, because you can’t expect the Queen to let go of that tremendous heap unless she’s obliged. But what can they do?’

‘If you remember signing the will, what can they do?’

‘Chevalier, you know Mr. Indagine. I’ve seen you walking with him.’

‘I know him very well.’

‘What sort of a girl is his daughter—the girl who’s going to have the money? Do you know her too?’

‘I know her very well.’

‘Will she go off her head, do you think, when she hears the news?’

‘I should think not.’

‘She’s to have it when she changes her name. That is when she marries—she’s only got four months before her. But perhaps she’s got a chap already.’

‘Mr. Oliver Luttrell says, I understand, that he is engaged to her.’

‘Mr. Oliver Luttrell? Lord! to think of that! Why, it’s almost providential! He’s to have the money if she doesn’t marry. Mr. Oliver Luttrell! Why, he’s in my books already for a trifle—a ten-pound note it was—he’s got

a place in that City College. Oliver Luttrell—little black-haired chap—ugly little chap—so he's going to marry her, is he?'

'He says so.'

'Then he'll get a quarter of a million with, or without, a wife, unless she marries someone else in the meantime. Lucky beggar—eh, Chevalier?'

'I believe,' said the Chevalier softly, 'that in the long run he will consider himself fortunate indeed.'

'You haven't let on, outside?'

'I have told no one.'

'Good. Hold your tongue a bit longer. And hark ye, Chevalier, if I can't get something more than the job of managing the estate, I'm hanged if anybody shall. And if I get what I want it shall be the best day's work you ever did to find that Will—remember that now.'

First of all, he thought he ought to call upon Mr. Clement Indagine. Crafty men always like to feel their way carefully.

He did so. He called upon the Poet in the

morning, actually disturbing him at his best time. He was taken to the Poet's study, where he sat before his table, covered with precious poems in manuscript.

The white-haired bard looked up, astonished. In the presence of so many books—nothing strikes the vulgar mind with more awe than a room filled with books—and that highly superior face which was lifted to greet him, Mr. Mayes felt small.

‘I have made bold,’ he said, ‘to call—to call—’ Here the difficulty of opening the subject presented itself for the first time.

‘You have come, I suppose, in reference to my works,’ said the Poet kindly.

‘Works? I didn’t know you had any Works,’ said Mr. Mayes.

‘My poems. If you represent any Firm of Publishers I fear that your visit is premature. My arrangements are not yet decided. My new volume, it is true, is nearly ready, but I must consult with friends before entrusting them to the care of any Firm.’

‘Poems?’ asked Mr. Mayes, who knew nothing of any muse.

‘My Poems,’ repeated Mr. Indagine. ‘You are, I presume——’

‘Lord love you, Mr. Indagine, don’t you know me? Boy and man I’ve been in these parts for forty years and I remember you for thirty, and your brother I remember too.’

‘Who are you, Sir?’ the poet asked with a sudden change of manner. ‘Who are you and what do you want with me? why do you disturb me at this hour?’

‘My name is Joseph Mayes—and I am successor to Mr. S. Norbery, Deceased.’

Clement Indagine pushed back his chair. ‘I have nothing at all to do with the late Mr. Norbery, or with his affairs,’ he said hastily. ‘I refuse to talk about Mr. Norbery.’

‘Excuse me, Sir. One moment! which you will not regret. You are his nephew, Sir, though that is not generally known. If I had known it, when he died, I should have stepped round in a friendly way to let you

know. As it was, you didn't even follow when he was buried, you've never claimed the property, though there was no Will, and you were the heir at law.'

'I have nothing to do with Mr. Norbery, I tell you.'

'Why, Sir, really now—it's only a day or two since I found out that you were his nephew—surely you must have heard that he left no Will—that is to say, that he was thought to have left no Will—and that you were the heir to all of it.'

'I tell you again, Sir, that I have nothing to do with that man's money.'

'A quarter of a million if it is a penny. And yet you never claimed it. Never claimed it. Why there isn't another man in the world—never claimed it! And now the Queen's got it, that's all. I suppose you know that much.'

'Understand me, Sir,' Mr. Indagine rose, tall and commanding, his white locks flowing behind. 'Let there be no misunderstanding

possible. Under no circumstances whatever could I step forward to claim that fortune. Never would I acknowledge myself to be the nephew of a man who caused my father—his own brother-in-law—to die in a debtor's prison.'

'Not even if a Will were found leaving it all to you?'

'Under no conceivable circumstances, Sir.'

'A quarter of a million!' Mr. Mayes repeated feebly.

'I have spoken, Sir. This interview has lasted long enough. Good morning to you.' He turned away and sat down at his table. But Mr. Mayes lingered.

'One moment. Don't be in a hurry—no good to be in a hurry. You've got a daughter, Miss Althea Indagine——'

'What has my daughter got to do with you, Sir?' Mr. Indagine asked fiercely.

'If you will not be rich yourself, you would not mind her being rich, I suppose?'

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘Suppose—I say, suppose’—here Mr. Mayes tapped his left forefinger with his right forefinger, as he had seen them do it on the stage of the Surrey. ‘Suppose there was a Will found after all, and suppose your daughter was to benefit—largely, mind—enormously’—he spread out both his arms with untaught eloquence—‘by that Will, you wouldn’t—you couldn’t—stand in her way.’

Mr. Indagine was not a man of the world, he had no recent knowledge of craft and subtlety, but these qualities were marked so strongly upon the man’s face: they lay so open to view in his eyes: they were shown so clearly in his attitude—that a child would have understood them. He sat down and smiled and crossed his legs.

‘So,’ he said, ‘it was not only in order to ask me why I do not claim that fortune that you have come here. What have you to say more?’

‘Why,’ Mr. Mayes replied hoarsely, ‘if

such a Will was to be found, and I was to find it, what share should I get out of the proceeds? Mind—the man who found the Will?’

‘What share?’

‘What commission—if you like it better put that way? I should be content to take ten per cent.—a mere little ten per cent. in a Quarter of a Million—a flea-bite—you wouldn’t so much as feel it—ten per cent.’

‘Let us speak more plainly. Without any supposes, you mean to tell me that you have discovered a Will by which Mr. Norbery has left his fortune to my daughter. Very well, in the name of my daughter, I tell you that you may tear up that Will.’

‘I only said—suppose.’

‘And, in the name of my daughter, I tell you that you will receive no commission of ten per cent., or anything else per cent.’

‘Very well, gov’nor’—he replied, sullenly. ‘When the commission is agreed to, and you’ve left off talking nonsense, we shall understand one another p’raps.’

‘Sir—’ Mr. Indagine began wrathfully.

‘Stop a minute,’ Mr. Mayes interrupted. ‘Stop a minute. Don’t say what you were going to say. It never does any good to get in a rage. Suppose you and the old man didn’t quite hit it off. Bless your soul; I know the story of the Queen’s Bench, and what the old man did. He was a hard nut to crack: he really was. But there is the young lady. You wouldn’t die and have her poor, would you? From what I know of house property, Sir, speaking respectfully, I shouldn’t say yours was worth much. She’ll marry, perhaps. All the more reason——’

‘She will continue in such a matter to be ruled by me.’

‘And she may have children. Would you like to feel that your grandchildren were growing up paupers?’

‘Sir,’ Mr. Indagine rose and spoke with great dignity. ‘One word. Understand me plainly. Never—never with my consent, shall

a penny of Mr. Norbery's ill-gotten gains go to enrich my child or my possible grandchildren. Never shall my daughter, if such a Will exists, seek to benefit by it. Never, with my will.'

'It's awkward,' said Mr. Mayes. 'Well—I've said what I came to say. But the young lady's chap will have as big a say as you, Mister, come to her getting married. If you'd like to have another talk, you know where to find me. Successor to S. Norbery, your own uncle. In the old house.'

On leaving the house he did not return to his office but he walked across Southwark Bridge into the City, and directed his steps towards the laboratory, where the most fortunate of all young *fiancés* was to be found in the morning.

He did not, as with Mr. Indagine, feel his way. The humblest money-lender would have a better knowledge of mankind. He exposed the whole case with a frankness worthy of the greatest statesman. He put the thing

nakedly. *Do ut des*—he would have said, but he had not so much Latin.

‘There,’ he said, summing up. ‘Now you know all, Mr. Luttrell. The Will is in my hands. Nobody knows about it, except myself.’ This he said stoutly, such was his faith in the word of the Chevalier. ‘And if you and me can’t come to terms, nobody shall.’

‘This is very amazing,’ said Oliver. ‘That Mr. Norbery should leave his property to me—unless—but the young lady is engaged to me. This is a most unexpected circumstance.’ His cheek burned and he kept his eyes down and fumbled among the papers on the table. His hands trembled too; all those symptoms of agitation are common when one suddenly hears that one has inherited a large fortune. Every one of my readers will recognise the signs from personal experience.

‘I’m a man of business, Mr. Luttrell. That’s what I am.’

‘Surely, surely. But, about the Will. Is

it not an extraordinary circumstance that it should have escaped notice until now? Are you quite sure—for instance—that it is a genuine document?’

‘Well, I’ll swear to the signatures if that is what you mean by genuine.’

‘You remember, in fact, signing it?’

‘Certainly. Why not? Why shouldn’t I remember signing?’

‘Why not, indeed?’ Oliver looked up smiling softly. ‘That settles the thing, even if the Will should be disputed—but if you remember, and since you’ve got nothing to gain by it——’

‘Hold hard, there,’ said Mr. Mayes.

‘Very well, then, nothing under the provisions of the Will. Whatever private arrangements may be made. You are, therefore, an independent witness.’

‘And the sole surviving Trustee.’

‘Quite so—the Trustee. I suppose the management of the Estate would give you a vast deal of trouble.’

Mr. Mayes smiled.

‘Well, Mr. Luttrell, don’t let us beat about the bush. The young lady is engaged to you. If she marries you at once the money is hers—that is, it’s yours—because the Married Woman’s Property Act may say what it likes but it can’t get rid of the husband. If she doesn’t marry you before the end of the year, the money is all yours.’

‘Exactly. It is a situation—I confess—which is astounding. Still—the fortune will be as you say, mine, anyway—mine.’

‘If I choose to let you have it,’ said Mr. Mayes.

‘Subject to that correction—no doubt.’

‘You will give me an undertaking to make over to me ten per cent. of the whole fortune—whatever it is, as soon as you get it—either for yourself or your wife. Nothing before. I don’t ask it. As soon as you get it.’

‘Ye—yes,’ said Oliver, with the air of one who considers only how to yield gracefully. ‘It is a great slice out of the whole : but as

otherwise we should get nothing and we are very poor—and—in short, Mr. Mayes, I agree. I will sign such an agreement as soon as you like. Nothing before the estate is mine, or my wife's. Ten per cent. afterwards.'

Mr. Mayes heaved a deep and heartfelt sigh. When the heart is touched such a sigh is very real.

'This will be a good day's work for both of us,' he said. 'When is it going to come off, Mr. Luttrell? When will the knot be tied?'

'The day is not yet fixed. I suppose in three or four months. There is no need to wait, but one must not hurry a young lady.'

'No, I wish it was to-morrow. I wish the bells of St. George's were ringing as they should for such an heiress and I could see you walking up the aisle with her in white.'

Oliver laughed.

'I wish I were taking that little promenade, Mr. Mayes, in such excellent com-

pany. However, it is all settled. Well, we may congratulate each other, I think.'

'We may. You will be a rich man and I shall be comfortable—very warm and comfortable. It's only common justice, too. I, who helped the old man to make his money, should, by rights, get some of it. It's only fair.'

'Quite fair, I think, quite fair. Meantime, for a man who is going to be so rich, I am ridiculously poor. You have already advanced me a little loan, Mr. Mayes—ten pounds, for which you are to get fifteen.'

'I'll lend you more,' he broke in eagerly, 'I'll lend you all you want—in reason—on the same terms. A young gentleman like you, with a quarter of a million coming in, ought not to be hard up for a pound or two.'

'Very well. Make it a hundred,' said Oliver. 'A hundred more, on the same terms. Two hundred if you like. Three hundred, then,' he added, watching the money-lender's face.

Mr. Mayes laughed. This was business worth having. Better and better. Observe that an ordinary money-lender would have hesitated. Young men die as well as old men : marriages are broken off : not even the husband has the disposition of his wife's money : the cup, full of sparkling wine, is sometimes dashed from the lips : nothing human is secure without security : this young gentleman offered no security. Yet where our hopes lie there we most easily deceive ourselves : Mr. Mayes saw his way so clearly to make this prodigious *coup* that he jumped at the smaller offer. There was this difference between Mr. Norbery and his successor, that the former never jumped.

‘My dear sir,’ he said, ‘I have not the money myself,’ his predecessor always used that formula. ‘But I can get it for you. The want of a little ready money really must not stand in your way—three hundred I think you said. Come over to my place this evening and you shall receive and sign.’

‘Harry,’ said Oliver somewhat about midnight, ‘is it safe? do you think it is quite safe?’

‘My dear boy, it is absolutely safe. Borrow all you can get meantime, and we’ll go halves. I’m only sorry—I really am—that we had the girl in it at all. Why didn’t we put your name all alone? You’ve done pretty well however. The girl don’t like you. What does that matter if there’s nobody else in the way? All the better, if she won’t marry you. And I think, dear boy, that we really are going to have a fine old time.’

CHAPTER XVIII

FLEET STREET REVISITED

‘BUT you promised to go back to the world,’ Althea insisted, ‘you promised Mr. Waller.’

‘Yes, yes,’ her father replied impatiently. ‘But he was to go with me. That was understood. He was to take me. You forget, Althea, that my return to the old haunts may be awkward to many, and will certainly be an effort to myself. I shall want support. How do I know, for instance, what kind of reception I shall have? I left them amidst their gibes: I go back to them in the triumph of assured success—How will they receive that?’

‘Well but, dear,’ Althea laid her hands upon his shoulders. ‘Consider, it is thirty years ago. You are not old, and you never

shall be old, though your hair is white. But consider, thirty years ago. That is a long time. You were only a little over thirty, yourself. And—you have often told me so—you were one of the youngest men of the set.'

'Yes, they were mostly older than myself. I should like to see them all again—Yes, my dear, they were all older than myself. Dickens was forty-five : Thackeray was about the same age : John Oxenford, Charles Reade, who wrote, I remember, a charming book called "Peg Woffington," and was an Oxford man ; John Forster, Dickens's friend ; Shirley Brooks : Tom Taylor—they were all over forty. William Jerdan was over seventy and so was Leigh Hunt. Monckton Milnes—he was a Yorkshire country gentleman and one saw him seldom—was over fifty : so was Harrison Ainsworth : and Douglas Jerrold was fifty-two or more—I think I heard somewhere or somehow—that he died about that time.'

'Well, dear, but think. They must now all be over seventy, some of them even eighty.

If they are living, they can hardly meet as they used to do when they were younger men. And many of them, in the nature of things, must be dead.'

'If they are dead they have left successors. The sacred lamp is always handed down.'

'But not the memory of injustice. Whose was the hand that wrote that cruel article upon your book?'

'I know not. That is, I suspect—I have always suspected. He used to sit in the corner, silent, and glowered with envious eyes. A small creature who had written poetry and failed.'

'Was it one of those whom you have mentioned?'

'Surely not, surely not. They were the leaders in the world of letters; they would scorn an anonymous attack—a stab in the back. Yet their tongues could be bitter.'

'Then, dear, why are you afraid to go among them?'

‘ You don’t understand, Althea. I am not afraid—not the least afraid. Only I feel a little awkwardness about the position of these old friends when they see me back again.’

Althea held her father’s works in the highest possible respect. But she could not believe that a single venomous attack upon them would be remembered after all these years.

‘ If I were you,’ she said, ‘ I would go boldly back and take my place among them. They meet in taverns, do they not? A tavern is open to all the world.’

Her father shook his head. With the moral support of his young Australian friend he felt he would have gone anywhere—without him he was afraid. Call him not a coward. The men who sat at supper in the days when suppers were still ordered and eaten; the men of the pen, among whom were sometimes seen the leaders in the literary mill; habitually employed towards each other plainness of speech, frankness, freedom of expression, and, in fact, a

license quite fraternal. Those who have read how Douglas Jerrold reduced his opponents to silence understand the colossal impudence which formed the staple wit of these *réunions*. At no time did this poet, even when he was young and fiery, quite appreciate jokes made on his sacred calling. At the age of sixty and after his long seclusion he could not endure even to think of them.

‘At what time do they assemble?’ asked Althea.

‘They generally dine at six, and they may be found at the “Cock,” or the “Cheshire Cheese,” or the “Rainbow,” at any hour between then and midnight. Sometimes there are two or three only : sometimes there are a dozen.’

‘Well, dear, let us go, you and I together, not to one of their meetings, but just to see the places where they meet. It was a promise of—of Mr. Waller’s—to take me to many places. He has forgotten his promise,’ she sighed. ‘You and I will go together. First you shall show me your old haunts: that

will be a beginning of your return to the world of letters: then we will go to the West End and see the world of fashion. Father, the past is done with. Mr. Waller has killed the past—for me as well as for you. We must make somehow—I know not how—a new beginning.’

Since the remarkable proofs of his great fame the poet had no other desire than to return to the world. Yet the thought had become a bugbear. How should he return? Whither should he go? In which way should he begin? As for money, he had no anxieties. Another volume was nearly ready. Tom Moore got 5,000*l.* for ‘*Lalla Rookh*’—why should not he get as much as Tom Moore? As in everything else, the first step was the trouble.

The time was come when he really must go back to the world. He said this to himself every day. Like all self-conscious men he thought a great deal about the world. It was the world which had driven him into exile: it was the world which he punished by his long silence:

the world again, with tears of contrition, was now calling him back and crying for forgiveness : he was going to grant a general amnesty and to bestow upon the pardoned world the priceless gift of another volume. The world—it certainly is always too much with us—is an elastic phrase. It means those whose opinions we are likely to hear : it means either the joyful derision or the green envy of our enemies : either the compassion or the admiration of our friends. To Bismarck it means the whole mass—not so very great after all—of educated humanity : to a young poet it means the little circle of his own acquaintance. But, in his mind's eye that little circle swells and grows ever widening till it reaches the circumference of the round earth and is in diameter nothing less than the great Equator itself.

But the time had now come when he could no longer remain in obscurity. The world recalled him ! The ' Saturday Review ' asked who was Clement Indagine, where

he lived and when he died : Fame was flying round the globe, was proclaiming his name and sounding his glory from far Cathay to Eldorado. It was maddening to sit in a corner hidden away and hear nothing of all this racket. Fame never hovers over Bank Side. Besides there is such a deafening noise from the hammer in the Works that one could not hear her trumpet even if it were a steam instrument, Fame's trumpet of the future.

‘My dear,’ he said fretfully, ‘it is intolerable. They talk of me : they read me : they quote me : and I hear nothing of it at all. I might as well be as forgotten and neglected as I thought. What is the worth of success unless it becomes known?’

‘Then, father,’ said Althea, ‘go back.’

But he hesitated. He was afraid.

As for himself, he knew that he was changed. Thirty years ago he resembled the portrait over the mantel-shelf : perhaps not quite so gallant in his bearing : perhaps with not quite such an electric

flash in his eye : but a proper young man, slim and tall with waving locks. He was changed, yet he could not choose but think that the other men remained untouched by Time as when he left them. This is our way. Twenty—thirty years pass, it is half a lifetime—nay, for those who work it is three-fourths of a lifetime : we meet again the young fellow from whom we parted laughing where our ways diverged. Heavens ! he is fifty : he is bald : he is fat : he laughs no longer : he has become stupid. We know that we ourselves have changed, but to think that others should have changed as well !

He consented at length, but with much misgiving, to the compromise proposed. He would go with Althea, and show her the old haunts. If not actually a return to the world, the thing would wear its semblance.

They started—one of them in nervous trepidation—on this eventful expedition, in the morning about noon, the weather being fine and the wind in the South. Bank Side pre-

sented no appearance of excitement or even of interest—probably because the papers had not announced the fact.

The Poet was dressed in his brown velvet jacket, now pretty old, and a broad felt hat ; with these aids and his long white locks his make-up was picturesque. The girl with him in her light summer frock and hat, who looked as if she had just come up from the country, the air of which must have given her so sweet and fresh a colour, who walked with so firm a step and was so straight and tall, helped to make a striking group of two—Grandfather and Grandchild, no doubt, come up from the country to see the sights of London land.

From St. Paul's to the Tower, Althea knew the City : she knew the winding courts, the little dingy churchyards built round by warehouses, their dead as clean forgotten and out of mind as any poor sailor wrapped in a hammock and dropped into the deep sea : the Churches, each one with its ancient history,

hidden away among the back streets—but she knew the City of Sunday, or, at most, of Saturday afternoons. The City in full flow of business she knew not. West of St. Paul's she knew nothing. Fleet Street was in her mind the meeting-place of the poets: the Strand was a noble line of ancient palaces.

In any other place than the City of London, and at any other time than the hours of business, this pair would have been remarkable. At noon, however, there is no time to look at anything—unless it be a horse ‘down,’ which would draw the eyes of a financier about to net a million. The Emperor of China might walk along Cheapside, splendid in silk and umbrella: or Prince Bismarck, burly, trampling and shoving the lesser folk out of his way, like Pantagruel on his great mare; or the Pope of Rome with his beautiful triple crown; or even Helen of Troy, without exciting any attention, or causing any remark in the hours of business. In the evening, when the merchants are going to their rail-

way stations, and the clerks are streaming homewards, it is different: then their minds are unoccupied, and their eyes are free to wander: then, a lovely shepherdess walking down Cheapside becomes aware of the great civic heart, how it beats; and of the great civic eyes, how they beam with admiration and praise of beauty.

‘Where are we? What has been done here?’ said the poet, looking at the great new street called after the Queen. ‘I remember a labyrinth of narrow streets—I have wandered among them when I was a boy. Where are they?’

The traveller who returns to his native town after many years, is either struck with the meanness and poverty of the place, or he laments the loss of the old houses, and the erection of the new staring mansions in their place. Mr. Indagine shook his head remembering what had been. Indeed there have been many losses of late years in the City between Mansion House and Blackfriars.

They stood at last on the steps of St. Paul's, and looked down upon the crowd of Ludgate Hill.

‘Thus I stood,’ said the Poet, ‘more than thirty years ago. It was midnight, but the streets were crowded because the City was illuminated for the Peace. More than thirty years ago—I went home to my lodgings—they were in Featherstone Buildings, Holborn—and began the lines—you remember them, Althea—they are in my first style.

‘ Upon the great Cathedral steps I stood
Alone amid the mighty throng—’

‘I wonder the “Saturday Review” failed to remark those lines. To me they have always seemed to possess a certain delicacy of sentiment—eh?—a subtle fragrance—the thought is suggested—only those of like mind would catch it—there is a whisper in it—a murmur of midnight—something ethereal caught from the moon riding in the heavens and the jewelled sky.’

‘I remember them very well,’ said Althea. ‘They are beautiful lines.’

‘My dear,’ he said, pressing her arm—‘I have one reader at least, who can see and feel the soul of the Poet. Look, what is that dreadful thing they have built across Ludgate Hill? Is it a gate—another gate of Lud, in place of the old one, but lower down?’ At that moment a train rumbled slowly over the bridge. ‘It is a railway bridge! Most horrible!’ He belonged to the time when it was thought æsthetic to abuse the railway. They descended the steps.

‘Let us pay a visit to the Row,’ he said; ‘it is long since my eyes were gladdened with the sight of the only trade worth attention.’

He led the way through a narrow passage into that remarkable thoroughfare known as Paternoster Row.

‘Ha!’ he said, looking round him with a sigh of satisfaction. ‘This is the finest street in London. I think there cannot be a finer street in the whole world. The books come out of this street—the old books and the new books: the stream that never fails—my dear,

I think now that I did wrong when I left the world to live on Bank Side with your uncle—I should have taken a lodging in Little Britain and walked every day in Paternoster Row.'

There were carts in the narrow old street blocking up the road in order to receive and discharge their parcels and bundles: boys carried books on their shoulders: porters wheeled barrows full of books: those who walked in the street seemed to have—but this may be mere fancy—a more thoughtful air—a nobler carriage than those who walked in Cheapside close by.

'I think I have never told you before, Althea,' said Mr. Indagine, looking wistfully up and down the street, 'that I began my active life here. If you write my biography, child, remember that when I left school at fourteen I was fortunate enough to get a place as junior clerk in Paternoster Row among the books which I loved even then—I left the Row when the little property fell in—all that was left—which my father's creditors could not

seize—on which we have lived all these years. Perhaps I should have been a happier man now, had I continued in the House—had I never wooed the Muse. I might have been long since the Head of a Department: a chief clerk: a principal Accountant: perhaps even a partner.'

So, after many years, when the man returned, the first thing he did was to visit the place where he had spent his youth. He always does it.

'The Chapter Coffee House was still standing in those days,' he said. 'Many a chop and cup of coffee have I had there. It ought never to have been closed. It was a national monument. But they shut it up before I went out of the world. Oh! The place is full of history: it is haunted by the poets of the last century. Here was the sign of the Ship and the Black Swan—see, the house still flourishes. And here was formerly the "Bible and Crown," but they have removed that westwards. The world of books! I used to come here every morning

at nine: the evening I spent with my father in the Prison—in the Prison—he paused a moment, ‘in the Debtors’ Prison,’ he repeated with an effort. ‘Well—let us forget that time. But the sight of Paternoster Row brings it back. Come, my dear. The years between were forgotten—I was a boy again, happy among the books all day, though I neither wrote them nor read them, and in the evening in the Prison—Come dear, come.’

He was already changed. The memory of the past softened his face: he had lost his fretful look.

He led her down the Row to the end where wooden gates stood at the end of a broad court.

‘My dear, it is Amen Corner,’ he said. ‘Let us look in. I remember coming here day after day, thinking how quiet and happy must be those who lived in this Cloister. To me whose childhood had been spent in a noisy Debtors’ Prison, quiet seems the thing most to be desired.’ He opened the gate and

led the way into the place: there is a row of quiet-looking houses and then one turns into a broad court covered with ground ivy instead of grass, but with a few flower beds and trees and red-gabled buildings with an archway in red brick like a college.

‘They have altered the buildings since my time,’ he said, ‘but they have not destroyed the quiet of the place. There is no other place like it in the City: not even Sion College, or Lord Derby’s Palace which they turned into the Herald’s College. My dear,’ he said, ‘it is so long since I remembered the old days—I came here for the quiet, to dream of being a Poet: I sat in the Chapter Coffee House my heart beating only to think that Goldsmith had sat there before me, perhaps on that very bench. And sometimes one saw an author—Alas! one can but once be young. Come, my dear.’

He led her into the narrow street and so to Ludgate Hill, where the stream of life runs up and down without cessation.

‘Fleet Street at last!’ he cried, lifting his head and looking round him. ‘We are in Fleet Street! It is too early yet for any of the poets and novelists: yet if we should happen upon any of them—but would they know me? And now my old friends must all be eighty years of age—eighty years of age!’ he suddenly realised what this might mean. ‘Oh, Althea! Can there be a circle of old, old men—eighty years of age?—sitting and laughing as they used to sit and laugh over punch and port? No—no—it is impossible.’ But he continued to look about him curiously as if it were quite on the cards that he might meet Dickens, Thackeray, and Douglas Jerrold marching arm in arm together, jovial and hearty still, though eighty years of age. ‘My dear,’ he said, ‘this is a street of Taverns, all sacred to the memory of England’s Worthies. There are the Cock, the Cheshire Cheese, the Rainbow, the Mitre, Dick’s—once there was the Devil as well, but they pulled it down a hundred years ago. Cruel! To destroy the Apollo Chamber, the

Kingdom of Ben Jonson ! Here we dined and supped and drank and talked. Althea, I am glad we came—I am very glad we came.'

All day long Fleet Street is crowded, and during a good part of the night and very early in the morning it is astir. In the morning and in the evening there is a stream of City men : in the daytime are the journalists, the printers, the sporting men, and at the western end, the barristers. At the dinner-hour the printers stand about in crowds : during the afternoon the journalists appear : more men know each other in this, than in any other street of London : it is a clubbable and social street : more men are employed in this street and its courts than in any other : the great Dailies belong to this street : all the country papers have offices here : hundreds of organs, journals, trade circulars, magazines and sheets of all kinds, are published here and printed in the courts that lead out of it. These papers which are always coming out on their appointed day and being distributed with zeal, would by

themselves keep the street lively without the aid of the printers. Fourteen thousand busy pens are flying over the paper all day long to supply these hungry sheets which go in white and come out black ; and use up every day so many miles of written lines ; and keep boiling such a host of deserving pots.

The returned exile looked about him curiously.

‘It is more crowded than it was,’ he said, ‘and there are many changes in the houses. In my time there were none of these great buildings—I wonder if any of my old friends will recognise me, but in this crowd one passes undistinguished. And I see none like them.’

‘But there is a terrible crowd,’ said Althea. ‘These people surely are not all poets and wits.’

‘Hardly, my dear. Perhaps it is some special occasion. No, they cannot certainly all be engaged in the pursuit of letters. Yet look, every house seems the office of some paper or magazine. Can the journals have multiplied?’

They were not exactly poets and wits—

the gentlemen who crowded together on the pavements, smoking pipes, talking, laughing, or gathering round the sporting papers. They were, however, the gentlemen who print the glorious works of the poets and the wits: and it was their dinner-hour, which explained the crowded condition of the street.

And then a very remarkable thing happened. No one could have expected it, and though the memory of it will always be a sweet morsel for the Poet, the adventure itself somewhat disconcerted him at the time. We are so seldom prepared for the unexpected.

They were moving slowly through the crowd, the Poet looking about him to remember the old places which have been so greatly altered in thirty years. The men on the pavement civilly made room for them as they passed and closed in behind them, talking quickly and with every sign of excitement and interest, but paying no attention to this pair, or to any other passengers who did not belong to themselves.

‘Althea,’ her father whispered with agitation, ‘I am recognised! hush, make no sign, let us behave as if we had not heard.’

He raised his head and straightened his back and his face assumed all the solemnity of a conscientious mute.

And then Althea heard from a group on the other side of the street this remarkable utterance—

‘Three to two on the Poet!’

She looked round and observed that although they permitted themselves such freedom of speech concerning the Exile Returned, the speakers who were common-looking men talking together with animation had the politeness to refrain from gazing upon her father. And she marvelled greatly because—how should they know him? ‘Three to two on the Poet!’—What could that mean? And yet not even to look after him!

At this point the crowd grew thicker, and as the idlers of the dinner-hour passed right and left to let them pass—this pair, so strangely

unlike the current stream of Fleet Street people, they stared at them with wondering eyes.

‘Althea,’ the poet whispered, ‘what do they mean? truly, I cannot understand it—How should they know me? Should I take off my hat to them? They mean well. But let us take no notice—that is best. It is pleasant, however, to receive these marks of respect. They would speak to me if they dared. Perhaps if I were to shake hands with one of them—but no—no.’

He stopped at Bolt Court.

‘Let us turn down here and escape our admirers,’ he said. ‘So—they do not come after us. That is polite of them. Do you know, my dear, that I have never before been followed and mobbed? It is a pleasant experience when one feels that it is deserved on the one hand and a sincere expression of admiration on the other. This is Bolt Court, Dr. Johnson lived here—that is the site of his house, it was burned about sixty years ago. And here—here—is the famous “Cheshire

Cheese." I wonder if there are in it any—but it is too early. They would not begin to assemble before five at earliest. Upstairs there is a room where there has been despatched many a rump and dozen. Let us peep in.'

He pushed open the doors and looked in. A noisy group were gathered about the Bar drinking and talking. They stopped, astonished for a moment, at the sight of the old man and the girl; but only for a moment. Then they went on with their discussion, and one of them smote his left palm with his right fist and cried aloud 'The Poet! The Poet for a pony!'

Mr. Indagine took off his felt hat and bowed low. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the Poet thanks you,' and retired, leaving the little circle at the Bar in a condition of so much confusion that they were fain to finish their drinks and take one more. Some, indeed, could not get over the thing for the whole day and discussed it at the Bar until the utmost limit of time allowed by the law.

‘These gentlemen,’ said the cause of their surprise, returning to Fleet Street, ‘must be some of the lesser lights. I fear that the habit of drinking, which formerly prevailed too much—I must own that—among the literary brotherhood, has not yet been abandoned. Poor Kit Marlowe lives again in every generation.’

He continued the walk, his chin in the air, his cheek flushed, his eyes bright. He had actually,—a thing he had never expected—received public recognition in the open street! However, he continued as if nothing unusual had occurred, pointing out the glories of the street which are mostly of convivial associations.

‘The Mitre,’ he said, ‘is down that Court. It was Johnson’s favourite tavern; that is Groom’s, the old coffee house—many a cup of coffee have I had at Groom’s. Next to it is the Rainbow, one of the oldest houses in London. Their port used to be worth something—I wonder if there is any of the old stuff left. Dick’s is hidden away in that Court

opposite: we used to dine at Dick's a good deal: they charged you eighteenpence, I remember, and you helped yourself off the joint. And here—here—where is it? I can't see it anywhere—can we have passed it?'

‘What is it?’

‘The Cock, my dear. The most famous tavern of all. Where can it be?’

He retraced his steps to look for it. Alas! The Cock was gone.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘I fear that there have been more changes than I thought. If the Cock has gone whither do the wits resort? Good Heavens! The Tavern sung by Tennyson! It should be as famous as the Mermaid, or the Devil. Everybody went to the Cock. Every night there was a gathering from dinner at five or six, to supper after the theatre. Where do they go now?’

A boy ran past them with an armful of papers, shouting, ‘The Great Fight! Winner! Winner! Winner!’

The people snatching and eagerly tearing

them open. And as they read there was a confused murmur—‘The Poet! The Poet! The Poet!’ And some shouted ‘Hooray! The Poet wins!’

‘Let us go, Althea,’ said the Bard hastily. ‘This demonstration is too much.’ He took off his hat and walked bare-headed with humid eyes and flushed cheeks, bowing to right and left along the crowd which made way for him. Strange to say, they hardly looked at him. But they murmured or they shouted: they laughed or they groaned: they danced or they hung their heads, and they said, sung, shouted, and whispered, ‘The Poet! The Poet wins! The Poet!’

‘Why?’ asked Althea in the evening. ‘Why did they say, “Three to two on the Poet”?’

‘I hardly know, my dear. No doubt, you observed that they were mostly people of little culture—it is some street expression, meaning applause or admiration. I remember there was generally some popular cry, the utter-

ance of which was accepted in place of wit. Such for instance as "Who's your hatter?" "All round my hat," "Proceed, Edward," "Jump Jim Crow," or "Pop goes the weasel," "Not for Joe," with others more meaningless still. My dear, in the vulgar speech these phrases mean nothing. It is sufficient for us that they have recognised me and paid me a spontaneous and hearty tribute of admiration. I shall make a poem on this day, I shall call it "Fleet Street revisited." The world shall rejoice at this accidental outburst of gratitude and—and—and love—yes—my dear, love. It is nothing short of love—and the love of mankind is the Poet's truest crown of glory.'

Strange to say, though the people shouted, they never looked at him. When Althea afterwards remembered this demonstration, it became like some nightmare, to think of those eyes which saw not, those faces which showed not the least interest in her father, while they cried aloud, 'The Poet! The Poet!' And not one or two here and there: not a shout

in one corner and another further on : but a continual roar of voices. Some shouted and some growled : some laughed and some groaned : some danced and some hung their heads : some shook hands and some plunged their hands in their pockets. But all of them—all this great crowd that filled Fleet Street from end to end cried, shouted, or growled in every variety of voice and expression ‘The Poet! The Poet! The Poet!’

At Chancery Lane they were clear of the mob and Mr. Indagine put on his hat again. But still they were pursued by the cry though it grew fainter and came not west of the Griffin. Indeed along the Strand, as the object of this enthusiasm afterwards remarked, they might have been quite common people, for all the notice that was taken of them.

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